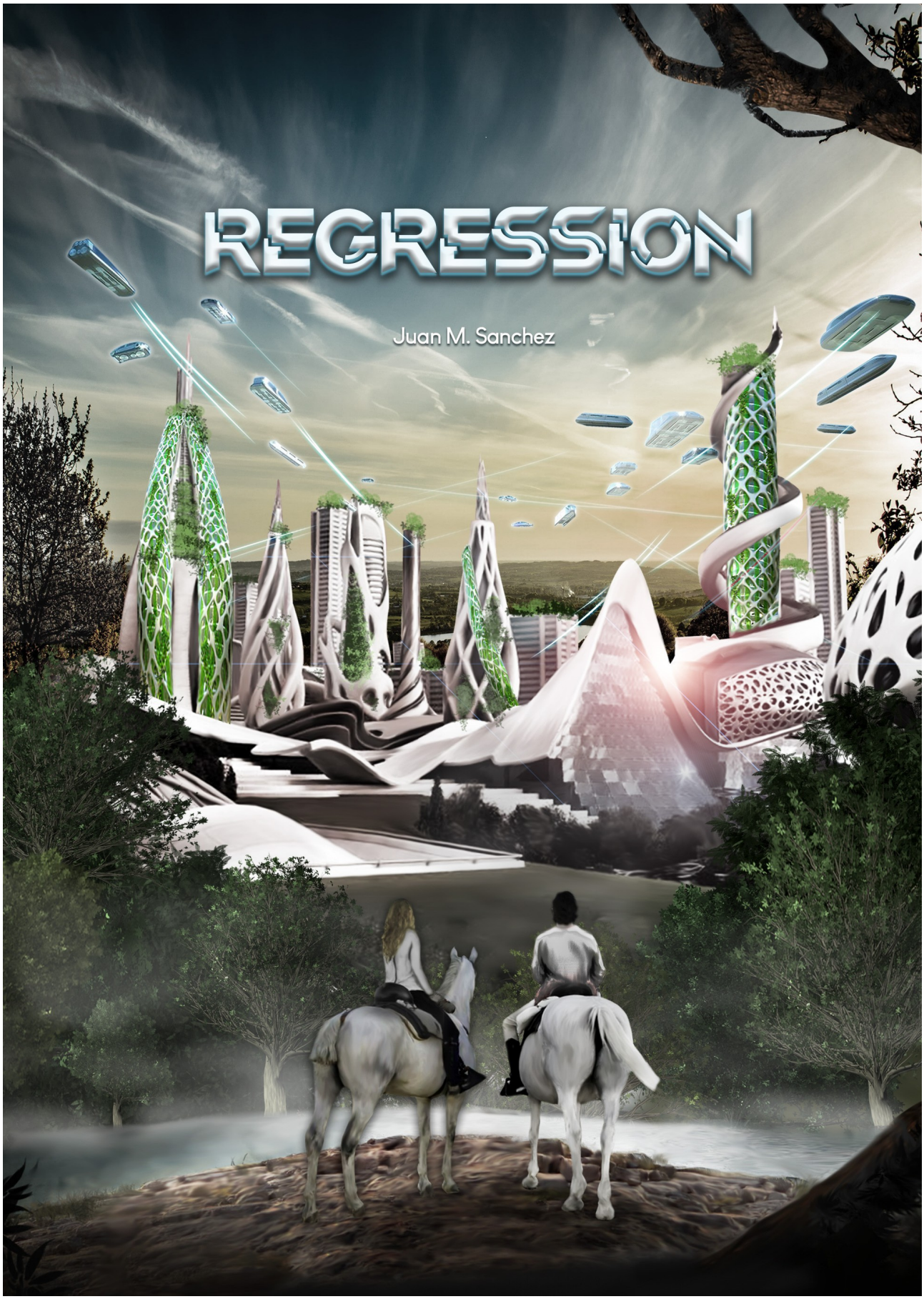
REGRESSION
Juan M. Sanchez

(The Cosmic Microwave Background sound is heard for five seconds, as if tuning into a radio station. Then, the sound gradually fades out as the narrator speaks.)

The year is four thousand, three hundred and fifty-one. When recording novels, we write numbers in letters nowadays; we don't mix mathematics with literature. There won't be any casual intro either. No one will wake up, put on his slippers and make himself coffee, only for you to gradually realize that his coffee is not a normal coffee but a futuristic one. From the go, I must tell you we live in what you'd call a utopia. Now, if you're inquisitive, which I'm assuming you are, since you chose to pick this book from all the sensuous activities of your era, you've probably already come up with two unavoidable questions: How come I'm addressing an audience from the past? or, from your point of view: How come I'm writing you from the future? And secondly: Does it take more than two thousand years to reach a utopia? For some, it might seem too long of a period the one needed by the world to snap out of its stupidity, while for others it's a relief to know that humanity survived itself, that we could at last learn to live in harmony.

Answering your first question: There are no parallel universes. I also must apologize if the tone of my writing is paternalistic, but I'm not particularly happy about the task that has been given to me: Retroinstruction. In simple words, it means interfering with the past in a non-invasive way so we can better our present. It's almost a quixotic idea because too much effort must be put in to get minimal results. Yes, a few atomic catastrophes have been avoided thanks to this method, but there's almost nothing you could do in your time that our technology can't fix. Evolution is a power that can't be contained, and the aim of this novel is simply to show you that. So, the theory of parallel universes is just another mishap of humans having a brain: Sometimes we get too carried away with our imagination. Even logically speaking, there's no way there are multiple universes, or multiverses, and even if there were, each would be a single universe, disconnected from the rest, which means that, ultimately, it doesn't matter. We have enough dealing with our reality to burden ourselves with improbable hypotheses that have no influence whatsoever on us. There is no way other universes, if they exist, can connect with ours, and if we happen to find out that there are parallel universes, then they will simply become part of our universe and will stop being universes because the logical concept of a universe is that there is just one. So, enough with that false paradox so popular in your era.

How am I communicating with you? How is a book from the future available in your network? That would take another book to explain, a scientific one that you aren't able to intellectually grasp for now, but I'll explain it in a nutshell and then we'll move on to the novel. The format of a novel was chosen because it's so popular in your era. You're in an empathetic evolutionary period, where intellect is continually sabotaged by emotions, so novels are a good way of showing you something relevant in a way that your conditioned feelings won't sabotage.

So, time is a continuum in which information from our present coexist: sensory observations; what we see, hear and feel right now. There's also information from our past: records, memories, etc., and information from the future: predictions, and speculations. Now perspective comes into play. The more we approach our present, the less reliable the information is because we have no perspective at all. We're standing at the epicenter of the event; we're part of it so we can't, logically speaking, analyze it, because the mere analysis of it would change its nature, the same as measuring an electron changes its charge. Basically speaking, we can't trust what we see right now, but we can trust what we saw in the past and what we'll see in the future. Now, looking into the future is a little trickier. For vision into the past, we only need reliable recording methods, which you already have in your era. Information can be preserved intact forever with your current technology. But for vision into the future, a good observation tool, a reliable speculum, is needed. The most advanced tool we have, even now, is our brain, so we tapped into it. There are sometimes great leaps in mental evolution done by individuals. These evolved thoughts are lost in an unreceptive society; what's commonly referred to as being ahead of one's time. In this way, some of your intellectuals unconsciously left feedback outlets in your information network. These feedbacks have frequencies and amplitudes that we need to sync with if we want to transmit any information, so we simply can't send whatever information we wish. Language and intention must be respected. We hack into any literary work with the perfect format for our message. In this case, we found this sci-fi novel called Regression, which has some accurate insights into the future, and which I'm basically overwriting. It's a complex process of synchronization to achieve cohesiveness; kind of like having the chord arrangements of a song and just tampering with the melody. That's why it was really important to find a good book in the first place. As I mentioned, the novel format is the

most efficient one, because it's ubiquitous in your era and it's the most intellectually evolved form of expression you have at the moment, so I adapted my message to it.

To clarify how this overwriting process works, I need to remind you that memory is very malleable. Generally, we remember memories of memories, until we can actually change our past through remembering. The words a writer writes take a new meaning once they are on the page. The writer rarely remembers what he wrote during that trance, although he remembers what he wrote about. That's where I come in. The themes and topics of the writing are the same, but the accuracy of the information is given by me. This is commonly called inspiration, but it's not to be confused with the divine inspiration of an imagined god. Gods and prophecies were just a deceit performed by people who understood the mechanics of writing and the elusive nature of memory. Maybe I'll discuss religion further on, but it suffices to say for now that today's society is one hundred percent agnostic: We don't know and will never know about things we don't see, although we can speculate and theorize metaphysically.

The process of overwriting starts at the moment when the writer uploads his or her book to the internet. If any hard copies exist, they remain unchanged. Only digital format can be tampered with, which is another limitation we have when overwriting. If the book is published both online and offline, the versions coexist as different editions of the same book. That is why we don't alter books whose originals existed massively in written form at the moment of their online publication. The writer can be deceived through this process of retroactive memory and believe to be the author of the book, but we can't deceive third parties that have interpreted and analyzed the book. Again, this is a matter of perspective: It's easier to be objective when we watch someone doing something than when we are the ones doing it. In a way, we could say that our whole life is a trance, and we seldom snap out of it to properly analyze it through objective thinking. Generally, we act first and create memories later, while we sleep or reminisce. Today, it is very easy to change someone's memories by inputting virtual imagery while they sleep. The nature of memory is so intangible, that today's psychologists consider it to be a mere psychic construct, a trick our minds play on us for the sake of sanity. This trick is similar to a movie, which ends at a certain climatic point instead of playing on forever. Our brains can only cope with neatly defined chunks of reality. Psychologists call this: the glass in the ocean phenomenon. Our brains can only intake small quantities at a time, but they are very powerful and allow us to focus on a glass lying at the bottom of an ocean. We can analyze

what's inside the glass but we can't fathom the whole ocean. Therefore, we build imaginary glasses wherever we can, so we are able to comprehend what's inside. This is due to the analytical nature of our brains, which tend towards concentration of thought. Today, however, we propound dissipation of thought as a more valuable tool for understanding the world and ourselves.

Moving on, feedback is just a form of quantum entanglement. Energy and information are narrowly interconnected. There's basically no way of carrying information without energy. Particles carry information in the same way red blood cells carry oxygen to the brain, only that particles can travel very fast and thus connect two points two thousand years apart in a matter of minutes. In our present time, we're entangled with our future and thus we double-check all of our projects to the point that we lowered the risk of failure to a zero point zero nine percent. There is still a slight percentage of error left because of the unpredictability of nature and the possible interference we may have while communicating with the future or past. The maximum lapse of time we can communicate with practically no interference is a thousand years, but even a lapse of two thousand years is possible with today's technology, so I'm positive that you'll receive this message in good enough condition.

To answer your second question: Humans can't destroy the world. They can, and they are destroying themselves every day in your era, but the self-destructive instinct overpowers the destructive one. Just look at your laws; they're harsher towards people who harm their loved ones, which means that there's a tendency in humans to harm what's closest to them. There is almost no randomness in violence. People don't kill for fun unless they're psychically ill.

In your time, you're going in the right direction in the treatment of psychiatric illnesses. Early diagnosis is very important, together with hormonal treatment, to make up for natural deficiencies. Hormonal, as well as genetic enhancement, was an important phase in our evolution, and thanks to that, nowadays, we're a healthy species living in harmony with the world. After having read this novel, you won't be able to deny the harmony in which we live, but I'm guessing that some of you may now be questioning its ethicality. Is harmony ethical? That's the whole point of this book. To convince your hearts of the goodness of harmony and why it should be embraced.

Chapter One

"…For the great majority of the religious, heaven and hell are incidental to right and wrong … In short, right conduct is the prime factor of religion." -The Iron Heel.

Life in the year four thousand, three hundred and fifty-one does not differ much from life in the year two thousand. Humans have not changed their goal, which they share with other animals: The pursuit of happiness. The same as animals in their natural state must struggle to attain their happiness, humans must struggle to obtain theirs, and that's why it's called a pursuit. Humans, the same as animals, can relinquish their right to this pursuit and live a comfortable, domestic life, provided they adhere to the rules of the society that enslaves them, forcing them to work for food and shelter. The societies from your era did not defer that much from wildlife, and that's exactly why they still held on to religious beliefs in souls and other contrivances that arbitrarily separated them from the animal kingdom.

Men used to work for a living or for money, which they then exchanged for goods necessary to live. The link between labor and life was there at the beginning, but, later on, it got lost in bureaucracy. Some people mistook the means: money, for the end: to live. Thus, they behaved like farm animals, whose main end is to get fattened and slaughtered or to subserviently heed their masters. People today don't work for money but for free time, which is the new gold standard. Because of this, the hours of labor were reduced to ten hours per week, which is the current average. Hours of labor depend on the strenuousness of the job; thus, there are people with strenuous jobs who work a mere two hours per week, while there are others with more pleasant jobs who work up to twenty, which is the maximum allowed by law. This might sound slightly dictatorial to you, but today's laws are descriptive rather than prescriptive, so there's no actual need to enforce them. But more of that later. Suffice it to say that by working ten hours per day, a person can afford any pleasure they want to indulge in during what you would call free time. Today, this paradigm is inverted: Our time is mostly free and spent on enjoyment and self-development, but we have work time, which enables us to afford our lifestyles. Work is not, therefore, a moral value, but a mere materialistic necessity. Hoarding capital or resources for our progeny or our farther future is unnecessary, since the global economy is completely stable and there are no more crises to plan for.

At first glance, this system might also look slightly capitalistic in the sense that it seems to be a meritocracy, but it's not. People choose whether they want to perform a complex activity or a simpler one, and there is no value judgment, so there is no more merit in being an engineer than in being a gardener. The mistaken view of capitalism was that an engineer could build many gardening robots, who in turn could take care of many more gardens; so the engineer was therefore above the gardener in the social hierarchy. But we know better about life's meaning now. A robot can never replace a human because it can't think as a human does and therefore it will never contribute that much to society in any area. A robot can only be designed to perform its task, while a human is there to interact with the natural and human environment, thus contributing to the pursuit of happiness. Robots only make good machines, which are used to do the dirty work no human wants to do, such as washing clothes, dishes or cleaning the house. Gardening, however, is a pleasant activity for many, and the fact that it's pleasant gives it market value, which means that no one in their right mind would think of despising a gardener nowadays, or of studying only to get a degree that says that you're smarter than others. Smart, to us, is to invest our time correctly.

The current system is simply called post-capitalistic, and it's based on the concept of sharing economy which took off around the year two thousand and ninety, together with the depletion of Earth's fossil fuels. It defers from communism in the simple fact that there is no redistribution of wealth but simply a more collaborative approach toward the exploitation of resources. It's rather enhanced capitalism than communism. No one is forced to do anything or to give up anything because liberalism is a key value of society. With that in mind, wild capitalism and the correlative destruction of the environment stopped being issues and the meritocratic paradigm fell into disuse. Of course, the law of supply and demand on which capitalism is based is still valid today, and that's why more unpleasant or less popular jobs are paid with more hours of leisure. Keeping in mind that we live in a sharing economy, you must realize that most things are available unlimitedly with a subscription fee. Everything is by subscription nowadays; there's nothing that you could buy in cash. If you think of the ultimate end of capitalism, monopoly will pop up in your mind. It all happened as predicted: All services were monopolized by the second century of the third millennium and a fee was demanded. Imagine that, if you ever want to eat, you need to pay a monthly fee to do your groceries at one of the supermarket chains available in your city, the same as you need to pay an insurance fee if you ever need to go

to a hospital. In the beginning, these fees were relatively high, but ultimately, they lowered consumption till the situation stabilized in what is nowadays called, in economics: the minimal necessary balance, that is, the amount of money that covers all the needs of consumption at the minimal possible price. This state of affairs is logical and easy to imagine. Monopoly is actually a good thing because it regularizes prices. Then the only factors are the demand, exerted by society, and the supply, exerted by the monopolizing companies; always keeping in mind that these companies are also made up of members of society, who are reasonable people. They want to provide services that are useful to society but also profitable for them, so they trim down their superfluousness. In this way, the sharing economy lowered consumption, but this was rather part of a holistic, cultural process. Because of health and ethical reasons, people simply diminished their consumption of superfluous products, which also corrected the distortions of capitalism. Supply and demand became more predictable with time, so there was less economic speculation: gambling stopped in general, as a pastime as well as a business. This came about because life became more stable. There were fewer and fewer military conflicts, and fewer and fewer fatal diseases or accidents. Conscientiousness and responsibility started paying off, so gambling was discouraged by society. Bravery wasn't to pick up a gun anymore, but to renewably work the land or contribute to the progress of humanity. Our intellect was even able to overrule the primitive brain, and women gradually stopped selecting their partners according to stamina and testosterone and were inclined towards intellect and harmonious beauty. This was an important change because women are the selectors, and in this way, they direct the progress of the species. In that sense, we can say that it was an evolutionary change too: We basically stepped up in evolution.

My name is Efrain Zielinski and I live in the metropolis of Posnan, Poland. It's the tenth of February and I woke up, as usual, around seven a.m., with the sunrise. Early morning is a practice the world has adopted so as not to lose contact with nature. Everything is done according to the circadian rhythm because people have become more prone to depression and mental diseases over time. Dark places of the Earth have been gradually depopulated, and with a balanced diet, we've been able to counterbalance this disadvantage of evolution: hypersensitivity.

Poland is much warmer than two thousand years ago, so we enjoy twenty-five degrees Celsius today. The country is, however, one of the darkest inhabitable places on Earth, so we're proudly in the top ten ranking of mental disorders. Properly treated, however, they

don't represent a threat or handicap to the individual. I don't suffer from any disorder myself, but I know several people who do, in theory, because with simple treatment they live a perfectly normal life in practice. In matters of physical diseases, genetics has done its wonder and has eradicated congenital disorders; vaccines and prophylaxis have also neutralized viral and bacterial diseases. But in psychical matters, we don't want to meddle that much, and anyway, genetics is still not powerful enough to be able to tamper with the brain. We allow for natural evolution in that sense, and we simply treat the disorders that may appear in the most natural possible way; because organicism is a scientifically proven value.

I work from Monday to Friday from eleven a.m. to one p.m. I'm a veterinarian because I like animals, especially horses. I work at a riding hall outside Posnan. I live downtown, so I have a five-minute commute by float, one way. I'll explain later what floats are. Cars have been banished from metropolises for more than a millennium now, so public transportation has really improved. Most rides inside the city don't take more than five minutes. There are megacities in all countries, but in most parts of the world the population is evenly distributed, with natural areas surrounding metropolises appropriately distanced from each other. The metropolitan area of Posnan, for instance, has a population of two hundred thousand people.

Taming horses is not considered cruelty anymore. Horses are merely used for riding and for equine therapy, and their training is similar to dog training. No violence is exerted, and the well-being of the horse is always a priority. Animals in general are under strict control. Zoologists and veterinarians have blossomed in the last millennium, to the point that for a long time, there have been no extinct species. Reserves are kept intact, and people can visit wild animals in their natural environment, but we also had to create a way of keeping farm animals alive without exploiting them.

It probably isn't a surprise for you to hear that the world has become Vegan. This was mainly done due to the relevance that a healthy diet has taken, but also since people became increasingly reluctant to eat killed food or products of the exploitation of animals. Farm animals are actually kept in parks nearby cities, where they live in a semi-wild state. Some people who have the means keep them as pets. No one misses meat or dairy, because it's hard to miss something you've never tried. I remember reading once that meat, the same as olives or pickles, was an acquired taste, that children did not like it at first because of its rusty taste, but that with time their palate got used to it and most of

them became fond of it. The scission between animal and human rights was superseded by a more holistic law that applies to nature in general. Even plants have rights nowadays. However, when we talk about rights, we don't immediately associate them with punishment. There are penalties, but none of them are inhuman, which means that none of them imply damage to the individual. Incarceration has therefore been abolished, since there are more economical and constructive ways of penalizing actions that are deemed wrong. To start with, the principle of relativism applies to any penalization. We're aware that morals change; history has proven it. Religions have stopped being a source of ethical wisdom, so we're more objective now. There are no universals when it comes to moral laws, only desirability. We wish for a certain kind of behavior that promotes harmony and evolution, but we allow for deviance. We embrace heterogeneity because it leads toward leaps in evolution. I'll give a clear example: Plants, like every living being, have the right to fulfill their biological cycle without interruption, except when they're used to create alimentary or utilitarian products. This law means, for instance, that people can't ornament their houses with dead plants anymore, the same as they can't kill animals for sport. However, according to the principle of relativity, someone who did this would be considered a deviant, but wouldn't be in further transgression of the law. As I mentioned before, deviance is well-seen by society, but it must be kept under surveillance. A quota is allowed, in case of deviant needs, following the Aristotelian philosophy of the golden mean. This quota is qualitative, which means, in practice, a tariff on the exertion of the right to deviancy. For instance, if someone is prone to killing flowers to decorate their house or to give to their loved ones as a sign of affection, they need to plant new ones or simply pay a tax for planting new ones. As everything is by subscription, an extra tax means simply more hours of work per month. Thus, working a little more per month gives people a certain quota of dead flowers they can buy: a deviation quota, if you wish. These kinds of deviant purchases are, consequently, made on demand. The flower shops generally sell legal flowers, that is, alive, but, if someone who pays the dead flower monthly tariff needs it, they cut the flowers for them. This blurring of legality might seem strange to you, but no more than it's strange to us your current system of laws which everyone breaks in secret. Laws are meant to be broken, and that's a sign of social evolution. But, contrary to you, we do it honestly and without stigmatization.

Currently, I'm on vacation, so I have lots of free time to write this novel. I would've missed my horses if I stayed home or went away, so I rented a cabin near the riding hall, and sometimes I pay a visit. They help me get the clearness of mind I need to write these pages.

Chapter Two

Erin has made coffee today, as usual, even though she seldom drinks it. I won't start a lecture on the healthiness of coffee now; it suffices to say that it's good if properly consumed, as everything else in nature. It's not that I don't know how to make my own coffee, but Erin is just glad to make it for me and I don't object. I like mine milky and sugary. We have this artificial milk that I couldn't describe to you well enough. But researching it in the olfactory-gustatory archives, I dare say its taste approximates that of your crème brûlée. That goes to show that we live a comparatively normal life today, if by the norm we take the standards of your era. Not much has changed in social fabrics, but everything has progressed naturally; evolution doesn't handle impositions very well, and it always finds its way around hindrances.

We've been married for two years now. Dating takes on average one year before people decide to marry or not. No one likes protracting relationships and giving false hopes to their partners. One year is the make-or-break point nowadays, and the first anniversary of any relationship is a big deal. We joke that everyone has emotional ADHD nowadays because we enjoy things short and sweet. Life is too short if we think of all the possible paths: all the ways we can choose to develop ourselves. But marriage is another issue. Evolution implies the proliferation of the species, and we can't do it properly without families. At this high level of evolution, quality is more relevant than quantity, and a high-quality level of progeny is only ensured by a psychologically healthy and stimulating childhood environment. Paradoxically, the more evolved the species is, the more fragile it becomes. It's almost as if the ultimate end of every species was extinction.

Properly raising a child is considered by some as an exciting challenge and, although some people decide not to take it up, we all know that we're not above life's cycle and that our greatest contribution to life is progeny. This era is called the Homogeneous Morality Era, and it's defined by the principle of horizontal harmony, which is only possible when

all the individuals of a society have attained the same moral level; otherwise a vertical harmony must be created, that is, a social system where the more moral individuals are not affected by the less moral individuals. The first vertically harmonious system was the retaliatory justice system whose symbol is the Hammurabi code, and which prevailed for almost five millennia. Less moral people were locked up to prevent them from harming more moral people. Later, I'll talk about our current moral organization, which differs greatly from the primitive form of social organization based on restrictions and imprisonment, which is unfortunately still in force in your era. Nowadays, we've attained a homogeneous moral level. There are those whose geniuses allow them to think metamorally, and this discipline: metamorality, creates sound laws that are mostly theoretical, but which inform our legal system. I'll say more about this later.

Going back to procreation, there is an actual eight-centuries-old global procreation law, which is basically taxation on infertility. Because of the obvious inconveniences and their natural inclination, some people opt out of procreation. They're generally geniuses in some areas, and their excessive drives towards their art or science make them less inclined towards procreation. But those who decide not to have kids must pay with a few hours of extra work per week. This tax starts being applied from the age of forty, if someone hasn't had a child. By this means, society can afford free caregiving for people who decide to have more than two kids, thus balancing the population growth. To further promote procreation, we have a free educational and socialization system from the age of three, but because of all the free time people have at their disposal, parents are actually very involved in their kids' development. Most people have only one or two kids nowadays, which has led to a great decrease in population in the past till it stabilized three hundred years ago. This is due mainly to practical and cultural reasons: A child takes a lot of effort, and most couples can't emotionally deal with more than two. In history, this period which started with the decrease in world population was called the Default Wealth Period. It meant that if you had parents who've saved some money, and you were an only child or one of two children, your kids were prone to be always well off, or at least to marry into wealth. Some wealth is always destructed or exhausted, but nowadays, it's easy to create new wealth. Basically speaking, an aging population is the best boom to the economic system because it equalizes society automatically. The price of commodities decreased, that is, there was a deflation of the economy, and everything became more affordable. The only ones who relatively suffered in this transition were the filthily wealthy people, who

could afford to lose a few million. That's why the current period is called post-economic because we've stopped measuring wealth by gross domestic product. The expansionist capitalistic paradigm has been left behind, and we've embraced what's called palpable wealth, that is, wealth that translates into better living standards. If we look at a chart of the gross domestic product in the world, there's been an exponential decrease from the year two thousand and three hundred till the end of the third millennium and since then it has stabilized. This means new wealth is only produced nowadays when old wealth is depleted. We generally don't work for money; we do it only to maintain living standards.

We haven't had a kid yet. That can wait, since I'm only twenty-eight and she's only twenty-six. We could've not married, but I'm very confident in her and monogamy implies a small sacrifice, which in psychology is called the conundrum of multiple choice, more popularly known as the conundrum of the cake: We think that by choosing something over other things, we're giving up on the rest of our choices, and therefore we don't choose, so we can keep them all, but in this way, we're actually losing all of our choices, since they eventually run out. Basically speaking, nowadays, we know that we need to eat our cakes; that it's useless to simply have them. People in the past were very resilient to commit to a long-term relationship. They attributed it mainly to its risk and gave excuses such as "We need time to see if we're a good match." Nowadays, we know better. Falling in love is a predictable psychological process. It's a combination of sexual instincts plus a basic need for change. We're continually changing and evolving, and we need someone to be able to evolve with us, what is basically called companionship. We can fully know a person's character and form an emotional connection in a few months, but later on, we may simply fall out of love, that is, stop feeling physically or psychically attracted to the other person. This is a normal process. There's nothing wrong with changing partners as many times someone needs to, but protracted, aimless relationships are detrimental to the evolution of the individual. We're by nature social animals, and to pair ourselves up is the simplest way to neutralize our sexual drive and focus our energies on our development.

People from your millennium leave romance to chance and are purposefully careless about meeting their partners. They fall in love haphazardly, with no conscious effort on their part. On the other hand, they want to rationalize the fact that they could pair up with anyone but have to choose only one person. This means an existential conflict to them and the more they date, the less they feel inclined towards monogamy. There are simply too many choices, so they don't choose. They are unable to switch on and off the search

instinct, so they mostly prefer not to search at all and leave it to chance. There is also the problem of sexism, so women who search are badly seen by society. Women can't overtly show their interest in men, so most of them rather resort to superfluous activities to kill time or to vainly expose themselves to draw male attention.

The situation started changing at the beginning of the third millennium, with the appearance of dating apps and sites. Women gained relative anonymity and men gained the opportunity to interact with many women and thus make up for their shyness, overcoming rejection by the mere bulk of their attempts. The amount of interaction between sexes augmented exponentially, and that changed the courtship process. More and more, the focus of attention shifted towards oneself. People became more self-aware. It wasn't about finding "the one" anymore, but about finding oneself in another person. That dramatically shortened the courtship period, a trend that peaked by the middle of the third millennium. People were marrying or breaking up just after a month's courtship. The process stabilized gradually and today we have an average of a year of courtship till marriage or breakup. As with everything else, in the end, one single app monopolized the dating market: 2get-her. The few hippies left, who lived and died by the rules of free love and would never partner up through the app, eventually phased out, because people would just assume that they weren't mature enough to be in a serious relationship. Of course, they didn't phase out genetically speaking, but the free-love habit did, and nowadays, no one would be taken seriously if they argued that they don't want to pair up with you because they want to be free. We know better today; we know that the use of freedom comes from the acceptance of responsibility. The same as space is useless without the matter that delimits it, freedom is useless without bonds.

After breakfast, we went to visit my horses. Erin is a dear, so she accommodates this great pleasure of mine. She came with me to the cabin, as she comes with me every day to the riding hall. She doesn't enjoy nature that much, so she brings her books and reads the whole day. I'm more of a contemplative person, so I enjoy having my mind clear of alien thoughts. I'm well enough alone with my thoughts and nature: Pure philosophy. I like wandering around for countless minutes till I get completely lost, and only then do I switch back on the cyber halo and make use of the Automatic Positioning System to get back. That's how I came across Valentin. He's one of the horse caretakers, but I'd never seen him before. He lives a secluded life, almost like a hermit, and there's something off about him. It's as if he wasn't meant to live in seclusion, but he was forced to do it despite

his own will. To start with, he struck me as very sociable; so much that I wondered what he was doing in such a deserted place. I thought he was on vacation like me, but when he told me he'd been working there for more than three years I almost shrieked in astonishment. I started working at this riding hall four years ago and I'd never heard of him before. I tried to find friends in common, but he seemed to know no one, except for the manager. His job is dispensable but very interesting: he analyzes the evolution of horses in captivity and the eventual way to bring them back into their primitive, wild state. He even showed me a few specimens that were part of his project. It shocked me to know that there was a whole project I was unaware of, but I was fascinated by the sight of these animals, which are a wilder version of our horses. They are completely untamed, and they have as little contact with humans as possible, to compensate for millennia of domestication. When the horses saw us, they immediately galloped away, so we couldn't see them for long. His job is very difficult because he needs to take care of them as unintrusively as possible, so he doesn't even have the satisfaction of bonding with the objects of his care and effort. I was too enthused by the project of the wild horses to think of asking about his life; where he lived, whether he was married, and so on. This lack of attention on my part became evident when I went back to the riding hall and told Erin about the project, after which she asked me about Valentin and she told me how odd it seemed to her that he worked in isolation and secrecy and that there must be a very good reason for this confidentiality. I was rather upset that no one had told me about this interesting project, so I called Maja, the manager, and asked her all about it. She just admitted to everything as if it wasn't a big deal. She apologized for not telling me, but she also asked me not to tell anyone else, so Valentin wouldn't be disturbed. That the reason behind his isolation from the rest was confidential, and she couldn't divulge it herself, but there was no reason why I couldn't go and ask Valentin whether he wanted to disclose his secret. She sounded amazed at the fact that I got along with him. She confessed she'd seen him in person less than a dozen times, and that they mainly exchanged messages and holocalls. Likewise, she said she was happy that I'd met him by chance, and practically pushed me to go and see him again. I felt hopelessness in the tone of the conversation, as if there was something terrible about Valentin that couldn't be solved, but that could be alleviated by my visits. The impression she gave me was completely different from the one from my encounter with him, which had been cheerful and exciting. I decided to go and visit him tomorrow.

Chapter Three

Today I found Valentin in a different mood. He was morose, although friendly as usual. He was happy to see me but couldn't hide his low mood. It seemed as if he took pleasure in infecting me with his gloominess. Without any encouragement on my part, he started poring out his mind on me. It was unprecedented in my life. He had no distance or respect for his own intimacy. He boycotted himself emotionally and tried to use me as an accomplice. It was mesmerizing to hear. He started by telling me he's lonely and frustrated because no woman he ever met could adjust to his sensitivity. He's generally led a secluded life because he can't fit into society. Psychiatrists have deemed him slightly dangerous to himself and to others. They advised him, for his own benefit, that his self-destructive behavior be isolated as much as possible and thus neutralized. That's why he works with horses, because of their therapeutic properties. He told me he was actually a natural musician and that would've been his career, were it not for his mental state. "Apparently music doesn't soothe the beast as much as horses," he joked sarcastically. He was practically forced to work and live in the premises of the riding hall, and he stopped giving concerts because people upset him too much. Instead, he dedicates himself to composing songs in his free time. He played a song he'd just composed on his guitar and, honestly speaking, it was the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. I asked him whether he put lyrics on them sometimes, and he bluntly answered me: "They all have lyrics, but people don't understand them, so I sing them tacitly." Obviously, there is resentment on his part; society doesn't understand him, so he has an ambivalent approach towards his creations. On the one hand, they help him poor out his strong emotions and, on the other hand, he feels they are wasted on people who don't appreciate him as a person. However, he said: "I still hope my songs will redeem me and will teach people to see things a little from my perspective, so we I can finally connect with them."

Now, I must clarify something about our era that differs from yours. Around the beginning of your millennium, a strong emphasis was put on diversity and tolerance as keys to society, but that paradigm quickly lost momentum and normality kicked in anew. Society in your era is still getting rid of the scourge that has plagued you for millennia: negative discrimination. The problem is that you haven't adopted the concept of positive discrimination yet, so you've gone off the tangent into relativism. Permissiveness is the order of the day; a kind of de facto nihilism: There's no universal good and evil, but something is good for someone and evil for someone else. In this way, morality and ethics have just fallen into disuse in your time. People have become even more fanatically religious to try to compensate; they've leaned on their made-up gods to try to find solace from the lack of moral certainty that reigns in your society. You are, basically speaking, in a new Dark Age. Old religions will resurface and Protestantism will overcome Catholicism because of its intransigence. Catholicism is too lenient to survive at such times. People don't take it seriously enough; hence it will become as relevant as astrology to society in a few generations. But Protestantism and the new religions will take over and they will moralize society. This will last almost a century, till people will understand that discrimination isn't bad at all, but simply necessary.

Positive discrimination was an artistic and philosophical movement that started in the middle of the twenty-second century. It did away with all the obscurantism of religions till they were stripped of their esoterism and only their reason and ethics remained. Then a universal ethical system was adopted. The world was already highly globalized, so it caught on fast. Some people declined this new ethics or disagreed partially, but it was there to stay, and it was informed by intellectuals of the whole world. A new enlightenment period was born and people were again interested in knowing what philosophers had to say. Debates about existence and non-existence, morality versus ethics, took more relevance than the old discussions about Islam versus Christianity or communism versus capitalism. Societies started focusing on things that mattered. Since then, there's always been a universal morality, which may differ among different individuals, and therefore the term: positive discrimination.

We don't say that being a meat eater and being a vegetarian are equal ethical choices nowadays; we know that eating meat is ethically lower. We accept this hierarchy first, and only then do we condone this action. Nothing is relative anymore, but everything has an ethical value. Homosexuality is not genetically cured because it's not an illness to get rid

of; we allow for it in individuals thus born. But we know that homosexuality has a lower value to society than heterosexuality and this is simple mathematics: Homosexuality contributes to the betterment of society by providing us with diversity, but were everyone to be born homosexual, procreation would be a great issue. This does not mean that homosexuals are underrated; on the contrary, they're highly estimated in society. But homosexuality is considered a deviance or a wild card, which might radically alter society, were it to become mainstream. Therefore, it's distinguished, that is, positively discriminated from heterosexuality. But this is simple mathematics, because homosexuals are the minority, but were they to become the majority, which is allowed by our social system, then the paradigm would change and heterosexuality would become ethically lower, that is, dangerous to the status quo of society. This is by no means relativism, but it's rather a pragmatic ethic. From the moment when ethics are informed by morality rather than by a made-up god, everything becomes more logical. Morals evolve the same as ethics, but this does not mean everything is relative; it simply means we don't know how we'll evolve as human beings and, even if we knew, we can't enforce morality on people. Maybe in the future, we'll be all androgynous or even asexual, but for now, the paradigm is heterosexuality.

I asked Valentin if it was possible for him to deal with his sensitivity and try and accommodate society. I said to him that despite our psychological condition, we're all free to change the attitudes that are detrimental to us, and he said:

"When someone holds you at gunpoint and asks you for money. Are you free to give it to him?"

"You can still choose not to.- I said-You always have a choice."

"Yes, risking your life in this case. But is this real freedom?"

"I believe freedom always implies a certain risk. You're free to speak your mind, but someone may not like what you say and kill you for it. You're free to go out of your house, but an accident may happen to you in the street. The exertion of freedom always implies a risk."

"Yes, that's exactly my point. The risk, in the cases you're describing, is minimal compared to the potential gains. That's why they are free actions because both possibilities are equally beneficial: You could shut up and live your life in peace or express your opinion and risk confrontations. You could stay comfortably at home or go out to gain something

from the outside world. But if someone needs to choose between eating healthy food and poison, that's a fallacious choice, because then the question stops being: What do I prefer to ingest? And becomes simply: Do I want to live or not? And if we imply that most of us generally want to live, then there's no actual choice and, therefore, no freedom. We're compelled to do something, the same as animals are compelled to hunt their meal or hide from predators. Then there's no freedom."

"But in that broad sense, we're always compelled. We have hormones that compel us to like someone better than other people, and taste buds that compel us to like some food more than others. That's mere determinism. There's no freedom at all then."

"But there is. The fact that we can choose bad things for ourselves proves it. The fact that they willingly consumed substances that make the body weaker and more prone to illnesses and accidents, for instance, or the fact that they used to give up comfort to struggle in the name of some ideal. You could argue determinism in the fact that these people believed that they were winning something in return. It's true that people got instant gratification from narcotizing themselves, and that they gained emotional strength from sticking to their principles, but they were still choosing freely. They were aware of the danger they incurred; they weren't deceiving themselves, as a person who eats a poisonous mushroom thinking that it's an edible one. By making a bad choice for themselves, they were exerting ultimate freedom. And here is the conundrum of choice: There is determinism in the slaves that choose not to escape, but there isn't in the slaves that run away. The first slaves basically have no option but to be slaves. They know they'll be beaten or killed if they try to escape, so there is no real freedom of choice for them since the risk is too high: They're determined to be enslaved. But the slaves that run away embrace their odds, regaining their freedom not from the moment they successfully escape, but from the moment they decide to do it. That's how freedom is born from determinism: When you decide to lose it all to gain something beyond your current reach. Do you understand?"

I understood perfectly, and I was blown away by Valentine's sharp mind. His logic was sound, although not conducive to anything positive. There was no practical conclusion to his train of thoughts, beautiful as it might have been. The same as Marx's theories ended up being abused by communistic despotic regimes, or Nietzsche's esoteric thoughts led to moral relativism, Valentine's thoughts, though sound, were intrinsically dangerous because of their turbidity. Such inconclusive thoughts may lead to positive or negative

outcomes, depending on their interpretation, and that's a crime in today's society: Philosophers are responsible for their thoughts, the same as architects are responsible for the building they design. In the past, many philosophical texts were susceptible to misinterpretation, which made them as dangerous as a knife in a monkey's hands. Because there's no doubt that's all we still are: monkeys. But we, monkeys from the future, have learned to put down the knife. Today's philosophers don't leave open endings when it comes to thinking. They don't try to be thought-provoking, but they try to be thought-clarifying. They don't fall into the trap of intellectual vanity, leaving unresolved conundrums, but they try to add to society, practicing Lao Tzu's teachings: To lead someone, walk behind them, not ahead of them.

Chapter four

I talked to Erin about Valentin, but she didn't seem really interested. We all know there are cases of regression; these abnormalities are common knowledge today, although they've occurred to a certain degree since the beginning of humanity. They seem to be quite exponential, too: The more evolved we are, the more we regress to a primitive state. Going back to the source, it's called. It's an inborn condition that consists in having a more primitive state of mental evolution. Intellect is rather a continuum, the product of many factors which could be summarized in the environment plus genetic predisposition; therefore there are many degrees of regression, and, as long as it doesn't affect the individual's ability to live, we avoid psychotropic treatment. Society-wise this process is undesirable, of course, but eugenics draws the line at it because we simply don't know enough about it to consider it a useless atavism to be genetically uprooted.

Intellects have evolved exponentially and quite homogeneously in the period known as the intellectual leap: from the beginning of the twenty-third century until the end of the thirtieth century. Today, our intellects differ significantly from those of people from before the leap. The assimilation of computers in intellectual processes led us towards highly analytical thinking. Data can be easily called to mind, but interpretation remains human. Cognitive philosophy became extremely important to fully comprehend our new role in the world. Our physicality became almost irrelevant to society, but our minds took on new relevance. There was a long period of uncertainty because we understood that the same potential for evolution and construction could easily turn into devolution and destruction. The philosophical battle between existentialism, nihilism and relativism was gruesome, but it gave birth to a universal morality which was necessary to get out of the standstill society had fallen into by the middle of the twenty-second century. By the beginning of the twenty-third century, the global society had reached a consensus on good and evil, as well as on the requirements for a paradigm shift. Ethics became a fully-fledged science.

Since then, the paradigm has been revised several times, but pragmatic ethics has enjoyed global consensus, the same as the theories of evolution and relativity since they were born. Society had come up with undebunkable universals, from which the fabric of reality started to be woven.

I must also clarify our current concept of society, because I've been using this term negligently, without accounting for a possible misunderstanding. Since universal morality took hold, society is equivalent to the individual. We allow for exceptions, but there is a standard for the sound evolution of the mind and a happy life. The current consensus is that regression is not a healthy variety, but a deviation that needs to be addressed. But, even if we wanted to, our state-of-the-art gene therapy can't prevent regression since the advances in neuroscience and psychology still haven't pinpointed the genetic components of regression. There's not one single gene for regression, but its matrix differs from patient to patient. Basically, regression is just an umbrella term for "failed intellectual development," which is common at the current intellectual level. Therefore, the current practice is to treat it as a variety, the same we treat homosexuality, that is, simply allowing for its natural evolutionary development. This is because, when there's uncertainty about the course of action, we apply an old method: The benefit of the doubt. That is, we allow for conditions that are seemingly morbid just in case they become the next step in our evolutionary state or in case it might give us the key to it. In practice, this means that regression is not treated at all, but it's allowed to unfold or be cured naturally. Eighty percent of patients just snap out of it and go back to a normal state after some months or maybe years, and the rest of them lead lives of variable seclusion for their own benefit because they can't properly adapt to society.

However, the standard for defining the common good is merely mathematical. Most of us develop without regressions, but if in the future, people started to regress more frequently, then regression would become the standard and it would be deemed good for society. The common good nowadays does not mean an ideal system to be applied and followed; it simply means the good of the majority. Also, regression patients aren't forced to comply with their isolation. Some of them have a very active social life, but due to the laws of positive discrimination, on certain occasions, they need to make sure that other people know about their condition to avoid misunderstandings. There is a specific list of rules of interaction for them, which is too long to enlist here, but, for instance, they don't qualify to use the meeting app and if they want to apply for a job, their condition comes to

light. Generally, a simple label -Regression- on their social media profile does the trick. They are also given compulsory psychiatric help to check their progress and learn about them and their condition. For most of them, it's just a hiccup in their lives, which goes on normally otherwise. A little isolation always helps them recover faster and fit into society again.

Erin didn't talk to Valentin, so I understand she isn't interested. I can't properly convey to her the sensations I had while talking to him. She's rather interested in knowing why I'm so interested, but I'm sure she wouldn't give it a second thought if I stopped talking about it. I'm not an authority in any area, which is irrelevant, because I could access any relevant information in a matter of milliseconds and add it organically to my words. But I'm writing a novel here, so I'm trying to dispense with Cyber help and only talk about things I'm well acquainted with. Nowadays, however, we're not naive anymore; we all know everything there is to know about the world, and new information is constantly uploaded and sorted on the net to which we're connected all the time. There's no misinformation because our algorithms don't allow for it. Everything is extrapolated a trillion times with previous information before it enters the net. Letting in fallacious information would be very detrimental to intellectual development.

Let me give you a glimpse of where biomechatronics stands nowadays and the evolution of superintelligence. It's important to better explain regression. Cyborgs are a mere science-fictional construct; they never happened in reality, because the technological level never caught up with the human level of injudiciousness necesssary for their creation. By the time cyborgs were technically possible, humanity knew better. Electronic prostheses are used in medicine, but there aren't electronic human enhancements, except for cyber memory, which I'll comment on later. No one wants to add artificiality to their biological bodies. We've learned that nature is inimitable and everything we could do to replace it would fall short. We've learned to naturally unlock the power of the brain, but we've also learned that intelligence is just a tool for happiness, so we must respect nature's pace. Our bodies and minds evolve simultaneously, and we can't rush the process. There's no way of guessing where exactly nature is heading, so if we rush it, we may end up in a dead-end alley, basically extinguishing humanity.

This doesn't mean we don't make good use of electromechanics. We're surrounded by all kinds of microscopical devices and nanorobots. We've harnessed nature, but we've given free rein to its only wild card: our brains. Furthermore, we've managed to control every

single factor in nature, such as viruses and bacteria, and even extraterrestrial factors, such as meteors. Solar flares, global warming and glacial ages, tectonic movements, volcanoes and every single possible threat to humanity are under control. I'll talk more about it in a chapter dedicated to the reasons behind the colonization of Mars, which started already in your age and was successful by the end of the twenty-second century. The planet was later recolonized, but more of it later.

Artificial intelligence goes hand in hand with natural intelligence. However, the trend towards humanization of machines simply stopped, because humanity just took a huge leap forward and robotics couldn't catch on. Machines excel at calculation and precision, and humans at decision-making, so the policy of division of labor was simply adopted here. Trying to imitate humanity is not banned, of course, but it's relegated to the arts because the attempts to create androids with human mental capacities are merely futile. Nanotechnology simply took the lead in human enhancement, and we've become the best versions of ourselves. The accent is put on the evolution of our minds, however, and not on commercial purposes. Therefore, no monstrosities were performed in pursuit of science. The aesthetic value of biodiversity was at last taken to heart, so people wouldn't give up their natural beauty; the beauty with which nature had endowed them and which made them unique.

Aging and the accumulation of cellular damage have also been reversed. Body rejuvenation has surpassed the longevity escape velocity, which means that life expectancy has dramatically increased. We could basically live forever, were it not for the brain, which is hardwired into mortality. In practice, this means that today, we have one-hundred-and-forty-year-old people who look like thirty-year-olds, dying from strokes. Brain damage is almost exclusively the only cause of death we have. Men tend to die younger, around a hundred and thirty on average, while the average lifespan of a woman is one hundred and fifty years. The second kind of death is euthanasia, that is, suicide due to psychic apathy to life. We have some immortals, though. The oldest person on Earth is currently a two-hundred-and-ten-year-old man. People are labeled immortals after passing the threshold of one hundred eighty years. They make up two percent of the global population, and they are an inspiration to others. However, no one can tell for sure what we live for and what's the ultimate end of life, and that's why regression is such a fascinating phenomenon to me because I believe it allows us to see into our future through our past.

Chapter five

Allow me to tell you a little about artificial intelligence to better elucidate the meaningfulness of regression, and incidentally give you an overview of our technology in general to satisfy your curiosity. I'll start with transportation. As I mentioned before, we've managed to harness nature and prevent every possible cataclysm, but throughout this process, we decided to use means of transportation that allowed for possible natural disasters, and even today, we keep this precautionary attitude. That means that we invest in as little infrastructure as possible in all areas of development. The means of transportation that at present is the cheapest one when it comes to infrastructure is the air-resistant magnetic hyperloop shuttle, familiarly called: saucer or float. This vehicle is literally a flying saucer, that's connected to a magnetic hyperloop on the streets. Mind you, there are no other mechanical forms of transportation available nowadays. Bikers, skaters and pedestrians make use of the sidewalk, but the streets are lined with a magnetic system, which is easily replaceable in case of a natural disaster. These fields are created by magnetic poles placed at every intersection. They aren't harmful to living organisms, as they are paired to the magnetic device in every saucer and only attract it. You could put a regular magnet one millimeter from any pole, and it wouldn't attract it. These saucers fly at regular altitudes, which allows birds to fly freely at other altitudes. This was done through genetic training. The magnetic fields use technology that taps into the genetic behavior of birds to ensure that collisions with the saucers are avoided. For long distances, we still use propellers, powered by hydro-solar energy reactors, a combination of solar energy and hydrogen fuel, which is also used for space travel. These shuttles also have a vacuum system that makes them air resistant, and they're much lighter than airplanes from your era and have retractable wings that allow them to soar through the sky when the wind is favorable. They can also channel the wind so it blows

astern and propels the vessel. Of course, every means of transportation is driverless nowadays. People drive only for sport and at tracks or airstrips specifically designed for it. Driving, like any other activity in which accidents need to be avoided, is almost exclusively done by robots in our era.
Energy has gone a long way since the year two thousand. We almost exclusively have hydro-solar energy nowadays, which is clean and efficient, but we went through many technologies: the replacement of batteries with capacitors, fusion power stable reactors, solar and wind energy instead of coal-fired plants, until hydro-solar energy became safe enough to be widely used.

Many technologies fell into disuse, for instance: Lab growing meat, which boomed in the second half of the twenty-first century. Vegetarianism stopped being trendy as the population of farm animals started drastically decreasing. Nowadays, we know that's more ethical to breed animals for consumption than to simply stop breeding them. In any case, to eat lab-grown meat is simply to replace a barbarian habit for an expensive, non-cost-efficient one. It's simply less costly and more natural to breed an animal than to lab engineer their meat, and this ecological principle is more important than qualms about eating sentient beings. With time, however, ninety percent of people simply stopped eating meat, so we had to reintroduce farm animals into the wild or keep them in reserves. We have the capability to genetically engineer animals and plants to better serve us, but we don't want to intervene with nature. We simply keep our distance from wild animals, the same as we do with regressive people.

Another technology that boomed already at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and which was later improved to eventually become obsolete, is virtual reality. Escapism was a common practice back then; people were keen on fulfilling all kinds of fantasies, and there was no limit to permissiveness. The line between reality and virtuality was so diffused that many people started developing avatar syndrome: the feeling that virtual reality is more real than reality itself. It took society many centuries to finally get rid of virtual addiction since technologies couldn't be simply banned and the withdrawal syndromes of psychic addiction to virtual reality were stronger than those of regular drugs, which meant that ex-technology addicts were handicapped for the rest of their lives. As I mentioned before, a technology that never took off was human enhancement. Cyborgization was a common use, however, till bio-restauration became widespread.

Now, even in rare cases of loss of a limb or organ due to accident or illness, these can be reconstructed from the DNA of the patient.

However, in a way, we've all become cyborgs, in the sense that we delegate mental functions to computers. At the beginning of your century, pocket-size computers were carried everywhere, then they became microscopic and completely hand-free. We could have access to memory stores, calculators, and all kinds of computational aids in the blink of an eye. Our brains became specialized in creativity, troubleshooting and innovation, while computers were left completely in charge of pattern recognition and data processing. Today, computers are so intrinsic to thinking that I need to block them while writing this novel; otherwise, they might autocorrect inaccurate information as I write it. I must admit that in our times, subjectivity is not as much appreciated as it was in your time. Even in novels, people like accuracy. You can have vampires, werewolves and fairies in your story, but in what concerns descriptions of the world, correct data is preferred. The paradigm is: truth is beauty, so the better we describe reality, the more beautiful art will be. This doesn't exclude fantasy or romanticism, since they represent psychological realities, but it enhances them. However, hyperrealism is an acquired taste, I must say, and if I wrote a novel in this way, you might find it too dense and unreadable. That's why I decided to do it without computer help.

Computers, as I mentioned, are on almost every surface. Computroniom is smart matter made of microchips in a viscose substance. This, combined with active matter, that is nanorobots, works wonders all around us. They read our vital signals and control every variable in human ecosystems. In nature, they are present in the form of insect-like drones, but over there they don't interfere but merely collect data and help us develop solutions to potential problems. A technology that indeed took off was nanotechnology. Nowadays, nanorobots are able to self-replicate, like any common bacteria. First, we developed a self-replicating, synthetic bacterium that helped us heal and regulate the ecosystem. But then we dabbled in the divine; we undertook the creationist task of populating the world with artificial beings of our own making. Nanorobots are our creations. They're as intelligent as our science could make them and they can proliferate. They're innocuous; most of our efforts went actually into making sure that we weren't pulling a Frankenstein. We know how technology, the same as every living being, is prone to viruses. This law of nature seems to apply even to artificial beings. So we created a safety mechanism by which nanorobots detect malfunctioning peers and deactivate them.

The self-replication process is also put in check by mere technology. The conditions for the replication of nanorobots are too specific, and they can generally only be found in labs. They need the raw material and an artificial stimulus to start their self-replication process. But, when in nature they deactivate an out-of-order peer, they can use their scraps to replicate themselves, thus keeping the balance.

That's as far as we scientifically went in matters of artificial intelligence. In the field of arts and entertainment, we recreate human intelligence, and we get human-like results. But androids aren't more than sophisticated toys. According to the law of sentient discrimination, we can't create living beings, let alone sentient beings. We can replicate them and alter them genetically to make them look and even act in a certain way, but we have no real creationist power. All our efforts today are focused on trying to harness nature, which as it is, it's a full-time job. To do this we need to predict evolution, to go with it instead of against it, which has been proven to be a futile effort. In a way, this is done by controlling all the negative variables and giving free rein to the positive ones. Negative variables are, for instance: illnesses. What doesn't kill us indeed makes us stronger, but at the same time, it drains our energy.

Everyone would agree that wars are a bane that needs to be avoided; a waste of human potential. The same happens with illnesses. They're a waste of physical energy, which can be channeled toward intellectual energy. Probably most of today's people would die within a couple of years living in the year two thousand, even from an accident or a disease. Our immune systems are weaker because we've adapted viruses and bacteria to collaborate with us. The same as primitive humans tamed wolves and wild cats, we've tamed microscopic living beings. This must come as no surprise, since your normal dweller of the year two thousand would also be helpless living in the year ten thousand before Christ. You could probably readapt to such a life, but it would take at least a generation to readapt your organisms. The same would happen to us if we had to live in the conditions you currently live in. Positive variables are those that are random. The same as art, which is aimless, is the driving force of human intellect, randomness is the driving force of evolution. There's no defined path for evolution; there's no determinism in nature. But once nature has gathered enough impetus, it's driven toward a certain direction. If we had the creationist power of nature, we could lead evolution, but we're basically helpless in that aspect. We're merely spectators in the evolutionary show.

Randomness, which is the nature of art, is also seen in genetic mutations for no apparent reason, such as the one that gave blue eyes to some people or the one that turned others into super sprinters. That's why regression is so relevant to evolution. It's like going back home to fetch forgotten keys, but it's done haphazardly. The keys of regression have been forgotten for a long time, so why this return right now? And what keys are we looking for? There are a lot of questions when it comes to regression, and only a few clear answers. Genetically speaking, there's no pattern for this phenomenon. It's as random as it gets. Tomorrow, regression could cease to exist completely, or it could be prevalent among newborns; we can't predict it. That's why every case of regression is nothing short of a miracle to us.

Regression- Chapter Six: The Martian Experiment and the Theory of Multiverses

The colonization of Mars started before there were the proper means to do it. Just like parents use to have children and learn how to raise them on the go, we've improvised the paraterraformation of Mars. This was finally possible only thanks to genetic engineering, since there was an unavoidable stumbling block for human habitation of the red planet: Our physical adaptation to Earth. To sum up: We did not colonize Mars, but we made Martians in Mars. As you may imagine, this wasn't a genius idea, but we did it and it changed humanity's history.

It all started with politics at the beginning of the twenty-second century. There were a lot more hospitable terrains on Earth than on Mars, but behind were the days of land annexation and colonization. Globalization had united all the countries in the world, and international laws had made wars between countries and military actions non-viable. Economic colonization was also coming to an end. The exploitation of other countries' soil and resources was still possible, but immigration was a luxury that no country could afford anymore. The world was overpopulated, and population quotas had been imposed by global regulators. The inhabitable places left after the global climatic meltdown had already reached full capacity and international law had put a stop to island-building, so all efforts were put into making hospitable places out of desert areas. But due to the Earth's limited capacity, there was no place for further expansion. An outlet for this expansionist impulse was found in the colonization of Mars. Such an undertaking was only possible by conjoining forces, so the International Community of Mars Explorers was created. It was privately and publicly financed, and every shareholder had a stake in Mars, from which

they would have a big profit were the colonization to succeed. In a way, it was an altruistic venture, because the project would take more than a hundred years to yield palpable fruits. However, like any other stock, it exponentially increased in value once the colonization of Mars became more certain, so many speculators invested great sums.

Many others, however, were in just for the exhilaration. These adrenaline junkies would even fight for first places in the expeditions. The idea was simple: To live in domes and underground, airtight bubble cities while paraterraforming the planet and constructing a world house. The energy cost for the whole project of a self-sufficient colony was in the thousands of exajoules to get it up and running, and in the hundreds of exajoules per year to keep it running. By that time, we already had the energetic capacity in the form of nanomaterial that could turn radiation into energy, and Mars had plenty of radiation. The first step was to find the best interplanetary traveling system: the rotovator was chosen because it could help not only launch, but also land rockets. This helped radically decrease the mass ratio of rockets, since they could be launched by tethering them to rotating skyhooks orbiting the Earth. Then the rockets didn't need to carry that much fuel, which made them safer and more economical. The rotovator project alone took the whole world three decades to build, but it was worth it. The next step was to make Mars a human habitat, that is, an oxygenated place protected from cosmic rays; warm and pressurized enough, so Earth organisms could survive. The lack of gravity, however, was a big issue due to the bone problems it caused. It was necessary to use bionic exoskeletons, which helped maintain the integrity of the bone structure. They were worn all the time and taken off only in beds and other surfaces with gravitational fields. The Martian pioneers were like builders, making camp on the site. However, these builders were also colonists, charged with populating Mars. Their kids were genetically engineered to withstand the Martian environment. Radiation was the main cause of death among the colonists, despite the shields, the drugs and the genetic engineering used. Many people's bodies just couldn't survive the evolutionary adaptation. The endgame was to combine paraterraformation with genetic engineering to be able to survive on Mars. Some elements like nitrogen became really valuable to the colony, due to their scarcity. Cargoes of these essential elements had to constantly be shipped from Earth for almost a century until the planet became self-sufficient. The full paraterraformation of Mars was, however, achieved, a few centuries after Mars was first colonized and by then Martians could not stand anymore the conditions of Earth unless they were retro-engineered into

Earthlings at birth. Otherwise, they were forced to wear exoskeletons while visiting our planet.

The parraterraformation process started a few decades before the arrival of the first batch of colonists. They were mostly engineers, miners and geologists. Although they lived in underground tunnels left by extinguished volcanoes, they had to work outdoors, being exposed to cosmic rays. But they realized that constant radiation wasn't as bad as people had previously thought. The body gets used to it, and with the help of single-walled carbon nanotubes called Trojan Nanovector, the short-term effects were counteracted. Their exoskeletons helped them maneuver on the Martian surface and prevent their bones from losing density. Regarding solar flares, this meteorological phenomenon became commonplace to Martians, the same as hurricanes and tsunamis are to Earthlings. They just watched out for them and sought immediate shelter when they came. Another common feature of Mars was its meteor showers. Meteors were shot as soon as they entered the thin Martian atmosphere until they disintegrated into small particles. These meteor showers became a new meteorological phenomenon, and everyone was warned of them in advance, so they could take shelter. There were a few casualties and some damage to infrastructure, but nothing to threaten the colonization of this planet.

The subterranean colonization of Mars lasted more than a century. No real efforts were done towards the terraformation of Mars because it wasn't technologically possible or economically practical. They had the theory but not the means to do it. The colossal effort of paraterraformation was comparable to that of the colonists of the new world in the second millennium. Huge amounts of capital were necessary, and some of the technology to make it possible wasn't yet there. There was a key difference, though. The ancient colonists sought a paradise to conquer, while the new colonists imagined a paradise in a hostile environment. But by the beginning of the twenty-fourth century, they were ready to finally position a dipole field at Mars L1 Lagrange Point. This project took four decades and when it was finished, it prevented the solar wind from further eroding the atmosphere and sterilizing the Martian surface.

After this had been done, they started creating domed forests. Up to then people lived under thick layers of carbon walls, to be protected from radiation, and received only artificial light. However, the situation changed with the appearance of forests grown inside domes made of newly-developed resilient transparent radiation-proof materials.

The atmosphere was heated up in these towering domes with the use of super-carbonates. Sulfur and fluorine gas were mostly used to create a super greenhouse effect. Through electrolysis, acid was subtracted from Martian water, getting oxygen, previously valued as gold among the colonists, as a byproduct. The acid was then used to dissolve C02, which was then released into the glassed atmosphere. These domes had been strategically built on the Martian ice caps, which were subsequently melted to obtain water and vapor as a byproduct, essential to heat the glassed atmosphere even more. Once the temperature was naturally brought to higher levels, cyanobacteria were massively cultivated in these greenhouses, which lead to the oxygenation of their atmosphere. Then trees and plants were grown inside these green pockets, and eventually crops. At last, half a century later, Martians could take walks through these forests and take a glimpse at the sun through their thick canopy. These greenhouse pockets spread all around until they enveloped every domed city. By the twenty-fifth century, with the help of skylights pierced at regular intervals into the domes and the forest surrounding them, people could receive natural sunlight once again.

With the advent of our modern nanotechnology, the bubble cities became even safer and Mars got the status of a properly inhabitable planet. However, atmospheric pressure is still an issue nowadays, among interplanetary travelers. Martians that come to Earth or Earthlings that go to Mars need to wear a special exoskeleton suit all the time. Fortunately, our current technology has made this possible with zero risks of malfunction and with minimal discomfort. People often migrate between planets and they get rapidly used to their exoskeletons, the same as people get used to wearing appropriate clothes on an everyday basis. It's as routinely done the same as shaving or wearing makeup, and they don't interfere with any physiological activity, not even showering.

Today we have two Earths. Mars is our twin sister, and we take care of her as much as we do with our first planet. That's our new world, the place for adventurers. It's tougher over there than here on Earth, but that's what convinces many to emigrate there. On the other hand, many Martians come to Earth to admire the Old World. There is nostalgia and a sense of reverence towards Mother Earth. Mars is also the best place for exile in the case of radical crimes; although it's been a long time since this social punishment was last necessary. Casting someone out of society, or ostracism, is the worst penalty anyone could receive nowadays, since inveterate criminals are still given a chance to start afresh in the new world and the debts they incur with their crimes are paid by society as a

whole. Since individuals and society are interconnected, it seems just logical that any crime committed by one of its members needs to be answered for by the whole society, which is responsible for indemnifying the harmed individuals.

I know that the paraterraformation of Mars may be of great interest to scientists and even laypeople from your era, but it's not the object of this book, so I'll have to disappoint you all by cutting it short. I'm sure in the not-so-far future scientific books will be written to pass down technology to you, but I'm not a scientist. This is actually one thing I'd like to try to explain: The passing down of information from the future to the past. As you well know from the relativity theory, the space-time continuum can be altered. Einstein's equation shows that energy is correlative to mass, and Planck's constant shows that energy is correlative to frequency, that is time. That means mass is correlated to time. There's no time when there's no mass. That twentieth-century building block helped construct the theory behind today's time-traveling technology. We can loophole into the past while traveling to the future. Therefore, technically speaking, traveling to the past is impossible. What we do is travel to the future through a bent space that passes by the past. That has lots of implications for time traveling. Yes, the past is altered, but also the future. It's just like bringing back souvenirs or memories from abroad. Of course, we can also alter other people's past or memories, but, oddly, their present doesn't change. This phenomenon is called a reality check. The past is malleable, the same as the future, but the present seems to be carved in stone.

Only information can travel faster than light. So no physical traveling is possible. In practice, what this means is that people from the past have visions of the future: premonitions, if you wish. They can predict the future. That's all there is to time traveling. There's also a limit to the passing down of information. When we reach a certain point, it becomes futile, the same as reading Shakespeare to a Neanderthal. That's what we call the megagenerational gap. We basically can't transmit information to different megagenerations than ours. They would hear them but not understand them. We could speak their language and explain in their terms, but we follow the principle of no rush. It's better to give civilization time to grasp all concepts. The evolution of nature and humanity has been flawless and it couldn't have gone faster. This principle is called the fate principle: we can't rush our destiny.

So, to clarify: physical time-traveling is not possible, because there's only one universe. There aren't parallel realities that would branch out from our reality in the case of

physical time travel. The past can fluctuate, but only in our memories. Our presence is carved in stone. Our mega-intelligence corrects our lives. So no matter how much information we send to the past, our present remains the same. We call this the principle of self-realization. Imagine a conversation: It changes the life of the person who sends the message and the life of the person who receives it. There's interaction. That's what happens with every input we give you. I could write to you right now the name of one of my ancestors and ask you to kill them and that would bring consequences in my life, which would be greater depending on the closeness of my relationship with my murdered ancestor. My current existence would've been a mere dream then, nothing more. There wouldn't be a parallel reality because my current life would immediately cease to exist as it is, the same as dreams stop when we wake up. However, if some of you found out by yourselves who one of my ancestors was and kill them, nothing would change for me in my life. I would have simply been born from a different ancestry line and my consciousness would remain the same. This would be the same as if you killed my father after I was born: My consciousness wouldn't be at risk.

This phenomenon is called the discretionary law: Only we can decide to alter our past or future, and we need to be aware of the changes; otherwise, it's as if they hadn't taken place at all. Imagine the reverse situation, in which someone who knows that you're going to become paraplegic in an accident in your near future decides to prevent you from taking the unlucky trip, thus saving your legs. For you, only one reality would still exist: That of you being still able to walk. Nonetheless, this person can also use their discretion to tell you about your second reality: that of you being paraplegic. Thus, you can get an imaginary glimpse at your secondary reality, but you still don't get to live it. Exactly the same would happen if some of you decided to kill one of my ancestors and record it in some place. If I read this and received the information that my ancestor was killed, I could imagine what my life would've been if I had been born from that ancestry line, but my current life wouldn't change, except for maybe small details which would've been forgotten anyway.

Now, let's imagine the most possible complicated situation: I tell you the name of my parents right now, thus revealing my identity and infringing the discretionary law. You could then murder them before I was born and I would still be alive, but from different parents. My life would then change drastically, since I would have the memory of the parents that were killed by my indiscretion and the clashing reality of my new parents.

And if you did even better and killed me when I was younger, I would immediately cease to exist, but everything I did until I infringed the discretionary law would still exist. From the moment you kill me, no matter if you do it when I was a baby or right now, while I'm registering these words, you kill my consciousness, but not my existence. Some other consciousness will take over my existence and live in my stead. It's as if existence could overrule time. Or, as we put it in the lifetime continuum rule: Existence prevails over time.

Time traveling is not physical traveling, but rather remembering the future. The space-time continuum is looped and you can see into your future, but you can't change it, the same as we can't change our own pasts. This is what Greeks understood very well: the fatality of our destiny. The entropic principle demands order in the universe: God doesn't play dice. Descartes said: I think, therefore I am. Today we say: We exist, therefore a universe has been created for us. This is also called: the God instinct. The mere fact that we believe and seek a superior force ordering our lives is proof of its existence. The same as when we feel the chilliness of the wind or the warmth of the sun. Our intelligence must have been made in the likeness of this superior force; otherwise, communication wouldn't be possible. And is it possible that the creation has a language that the creator can't understand? And by creator, I mean: nature. There's no doubt that nature is the creator, since we know today that it's impossible to replicate nature in its full creational force. And we know that we communicate with nature because we have senses that capture it and we can recreate it and transform it, which is basic communication. So, according to the entropic principle, an observable universe implies observers. That is, we're necessary to the universe; furthermore, we're the natural consequence of an observable universe. We're not by chance, we have a destiny: evolution and enlightenment.

This is where we draw the line nowadays. In your era, people talked about multiverses, which implied that some universes weren't conducive to intelligent life. But even if these universes existed, what would be their purpose; and if no one could observe them, would they exist? Doesn't existence itself implies communication? Can we exist in isolation from other entities? Can we have consciousness without a world to reflect it on? That's where the multiverse theory falls apart. Or rather, yes, there are innumerable multiverses… in our imagination. As many as we can imagine. That's the only way they can exist: hypothetically. For them to materialize, they'd have to enter our universe and be observable to us, and therefore they would just become one with our universe. Or, if they

can't be observable to us, then they wouldn't exist to us. This is a simple tautology: There are parallel universes, that is, there are non-universes, which we can't observe. It's the same as saying: There are flying pigs that no one can see. The idea of multiverses is merely circular reasoning.

Chapter Seven

In today's world, I'm the closest there is to a novelist. In contrast to the evolution of science, fiction has become less and less popular with time. Nowadays, people tend to embrace reality, and fiction is a distraction that's only occasionally indulged in. It goes for every other art expression: cinema and theater, for instance. Realistic themes are prohibitively favorite, so the most similar genre to a novel is a reportage essay, such as the one I'm registering right now. Allow me to admit that I've added no iota of fiction to this text. Besides my opinions and conclusions, everything you read here is as real as my perceptions can guarantee. I started this book just when I met Valentine, and I add entries whenever something eventful happens, so I know just as much as you about the dénouement of the story. At first, I didn't know how long it would take to finish it, but due to the recent evolution of Valentin's situation, I think very soon I'll have a finished work to present to you.

Seven weeks have uneventfully elapsed since I met our protagonist and, other than a few chapters about our current technology and the history of Martian colonization, there was nothing to talk about. But today I've had very interesting news about Valentin, and I'm directly quoting here: "I found the girl of my dreams." We don't talk with those terms nowadays, because they're simply meaningless. We prefer to relegate dreams to the unconscious and talk about reality. I would rather say he found someone who can put up with his nonsense, but of course, I didn't share this opinion with him because his elation was too dangerously great to safely put a check on. I see in front of me a malfunctioning vehicle heading toward an inevitable crash, and there's nothing I can do about it. I've tried to reason with him, probing his sanity, but to no avail. He's simply lost it, and there's no pulling him out of the upcoming wreckage.

The mere circumstances in which they met is enough matter for disapproval. As I mentioned before, we don't leave our emotional future to chance, so we mostly meet through a match-making application with meticulously honed algorithms that ensure compatibility. Furthermore, throughout our dating cycle, we wear gadgets that ensure the correct reading of our emotions through the measurement of our hormones, heart rate, and blood vessels. After all, you can cheat your mind but not your body. These measurements are openly shared with the other person for them to make an informed decision. Often a general history of psychosomatic measurements is presented to your potential partner, so they can calibrate the analysis of your current emotional state, the same way lie detectors are calibrated in your era. While dating, and in general in our social lives, a transparency policy is always adopted. Dishonesty is proven to be harmful to both parties in the long run, so it's not a legitimate option.

Let me start by pointing out that Valentin met his girlfriend by mere chance. The irreverence with which he ventured into coupling with this girl should've been enough deterrent to her emotional attachment, but, oddly enough, it produced the opposite effect. I won't analyze her because I don't know her circumstances, but as much as I wish to believe she suffers from regression too, everything seems to indicate the opposite. According to the information he gave me about her, she's a functional person with no apparent psychological flaws. She's a teacher, which demands a flawless psyche, regularly checked by neurological and psychiatric tests. Her whole circumstance prior to meeting him was very normal. She came to do some horse riding because she's just moved into the area to work at a nearby school. Her age is adequate for such an event in her life: She's twenty-three years old and she's just finished her studies. Horse riding has always been her sport of choice, so it was just natural for her to continue it in her new place. He's also told me details that she's openly shared about her personal life: She's had four dating partners, only one of which led to some emotional engagement, but not enough to warrant further commitment. They broke up after six months of relationship and now she is ready for a new one. Everything is normal until we factor in Valentin. With him in the equation, she seems to have lost her mind, as if regression was contagious.

I'll stop stalling now and tell you what happened. For no other reason than the tingling of his hormones, Valentin switched the horse which was meant for her with another one meant for more advanced riders. Needless to say, she couldn't rein in the horse's spirits, and it carried her on a lively gallop outside the riding arena and into the adjacent forest.

Our hero, therefore, climbed on his horse and saved a damsel in distress. While soothing her with a hot tea and his hand on her shoulder, he explained to her that he'd switched the horses by mistake because he surmised from her gracefulness that she was an expert rider, and she believed it and thanked him for his courage and swift reaction. Valentin actually told me that for a moment he'd thought that she would hit her head against a hanging branch or fall headfirst into a rock and gravely hurt herself, but fortune had it that he could get to her on time and tear her from the clutches of death, and I'm quoting again. Basically speaking, he gambled her life just to make a good first impression. I would've given her the benefit of the doubt, was this the end of the story. I would've assumed that she'd seen the madness of his actions and wanted simply to be rid of him as soon as possible, without getting into an altercation. But no, our hero asked her on a date, to which she agreed for a very bad reason: Out of gratitude for saving her from the danger he'd put her in the first place, and from the adrenaline rush she'd had and which is, to tell the truth, very uncommon in our days. At the very beginning of the date, he told her the truth, or at least his version of it. He said that a primeval urge called upon him at that moment, and he knew that he was risking her life, and he apologized for that on his knees, but he also knew their lives were cosmically intertwined, so he'd actually risked his own life too, because losing her or missing the chance to strike up a meaningful relationship with her, would mean death to him.

The mere tone of this declaration should've been her cue to nip this acquaintance in the bud, but the situation evolved diametrically differently from how it should. She obviated his suicidal views of romance, together with his originally dishonest behavior and, to culminate, she told him she couldn't be upset at him since no harm had fallen upon her. For all she knew, he was her savior. I can't emphasize enough that we don't talk like that nowadays. That's mere nonsense, which may not sound like that to you, but is a shocking instance of amorality to us. If anyone said something similar to me, I would immediately know this person has some sort of regression, but again, this woman has no clinical regression, and other than what she then said to Valentin, she is perfectly normal. I could confirm this by talking to the rest of the staff from the riding hall. She explained the situation to them, accounting for Valentin's imprudence, but also praising him for how he fixed his own mistake. She was completely composed when she said all that, and she even lightheartedly thanked them for that dose of adrenaline that broke the monotony of her uneventful life. Of course, her knowing smile gave away the irony in her tone, so

everyone laughed with her. But, this was not enough to convince me, so I needed to make sure with my own ears that this woman was normal. I asked Valentin when her next riding lesson was, which she, of course, took with him instead of her instructor. I must add that, although Valentin rides as if he'd been born on horseback, he's not an instructor and she's the first person he's ever taught to ride, from all I know. From a prudent distance, I saw her ride and interact with Valentine. But I went even further. When her lesson was over and they were engaged in jovial conversation and a little caressing, I shut the book I was pretending to read under the leafy crown of a linden tree and I went up to them, with the excuse of saying goodbye to him. He gallantly introduced her to me and asked me to stay for a drink; an offer I was beforehand ready not to refuse. Her name is Milena. I talked with her, asking her many innocuous questions to test her psychological state. If she had some sort of non-clinical regression, she hid it very well in front of me. For a moment I even thought that Valentin had just made up her words and reactions to his behavior, but the situation in front of me belied this lucubration. She was there, after all, by his side, and they were clearly together. I asked her three different times regarding the dating app, whether it didn't concern her not to have used it and she gave me a reasonable answer: "Not everything is written in our stars; sometimes we need to write some chapters in our memoirs by ourselves." She was impeccable. Most people indeed meet through the app, but this is not a compulsory rule. Some people do meet by chance and, following the conviction of their hearts, try to develop a relationship from this casual meeting. It is just highly statistically improbable to have a harmonious relationship this way and it demands a lot of patience; that's why people generally just choose the app when they want to date. My next question was whether the fact that Valentin suffered from regression concerned her and again she answered: "I'm responsible for my own life, and up to now it's the only thing I've risked by allowing an attachment between him and me to be formed. If I didn't believe that this attachment could be beneficial to us both, or if I stopped believing it, I would immediately break up with him."

That's as far as I dared to go with my questioning. I had intruded enough in their lives and, odd as her behavior might seem to me, it was flawlessly legitimate. She has no people under her care; she is free to do with her life as she wishes. For some, her attitude may even be seen as brave and selfless, pioneering in breaking the barrier between regression and normality. But for others, like me, her attitude is incomprehensible. It's too risky and not rewarding at all. Granted, the rush of adrenaline may have played a very

important factor in her original emotions towards him and she might have locked her mind into seeing this relationship through, but I can't believe she is seriously thinking it's going to work out. Reason should gradually draw her away from the idea, but for now, she seems determined to make it work. It was useless to question Valentin, since he'd inevitably give me some preposterous answer. Even the most practical issue of his refusal to make use of hormone-measurement devices lacked any logical explanation.

Today, we don't adhere anymore to the Platonic division between body and soul. Science and philosophy have proven that there's no independent entity we could call the soul. Body and soul are just manifestations of the same phenomenon: life. Where life is absent, the soul lacks too or, best-case scenario, is dormant. In any case, there's no activity of the soul without a body, and therefore every living body has a soul or, in other words, the soul of every living organism is also its body. This has also been proven by experience. People are substantially happier since they've started adhering to this view. Some concepts have fallen into disuse, for instance: sacrifice. This concept was only possible when people believed there was something sacred beyond our existence. Sacrifice is nothing more than the repudiation of the body in pursuit of a higher value. But now we know that there's nothing more sacred than life itself and that, by repudiating our body, we're committing a sacrilege. So, only reasonable actions are performed nowadays. If you renounce something for the benefit of someone loved by you, then the gladness you feel for this person's happiness is your reward and therefore is not a sacrifice. But if you renounce something, wasting it because you don't believe in earthly pleasures, then you're disowning life itself, and you're injuring yourself and, subsequently, the whole society. This sort of irresponsible behavior is condemned nowadays.

Many other concepts have fallen into disuse, especially religious and patriarchal ones: Piety, guilt, redemption, patriotism and heroism. To put it bluntly, no one does heroic acts anymore. Everyone takes care of themselves and does the most they can to help others, and this suffices society. The mere fact of not being a burden to others is heroic enough. We see heroism in what in your time would be considered pusillanimous acts, such as wearing protection when doing something dangerous and simply avoiding unnecessary risks. The whole farce of evil and heroes comes from the same dichotomy between body and soul. Nowadays, no one can be evil without also damaging themselves. Besides, evil doesn't catch on in a harmonious society. Since evil thrives only in evil, if there aren't evil feelings in a society, there's nothing a single evil person can do; it would be like trying to

light up a forest of healthy treas. Evil, we've learned, is just a symptom of an ill society, and therefore there are no anti-heroes, but simply people who manifest what's wrong with the world. Therefore, we treat especially kindly people who manifest evil traits because they're like a baby's cry for help.

Granted, Valentin is a crying child, so there's no way to overlook him. We need to pay attention to him, but is Milena's way the right one? Can there exist a stable sexual relationship with a regressed person? What's the point of their encounters if not just an irresponsible waste of their time? To cut losses, Valentin could look for a suitable partner among people with his same condition, and Milena could spare both of them the heartbreak of the inevitable dissolution of their relationship. As much as I like Valentin, I can't help seeing that he isn't made for a stable relationship and that he's having a harmful influence on this girl. He shows all the symptoms of a retrograde mindset that doesn't recognize things for what they are.

A long time ago, our hyped-up egos gave too great importance to the butterfly effect, that is, the potentially large effect of a small change in the whole system, but this phenomenon is just like ripples on water: the system eventually comes back to its natural course. So there is no way of canceling a certain future by altering the past, the same as there's no way of denying a river its outlet. This is what our current matching app represents: that destiny is in our hands. Chance is just a feature of the entropic principle. If everyone is organized, we diminish the chance effect and have more positive results, that is, results that we expected. The matching system we currently use includes almost all available people; the few who choose to opt out do it because they are either not looking for a relationship or are indifferent to finding a partner. But those of us who are really looking for someone use the app, which will match us quickly according to our needs and desires. This process diminishes the chance effect, which is detrimental to a harmonious system. Chance will never help you get someone who you wouldn't get in the first place by sensible means. Chance is just a euphemism for lack of organization, and it may have been fun a couple of thousands of years ago, but now we are aware of its harmfulness. Coupling is all about supply and demand: A man and a woman choose among their suitors at a certain moment in their lives. There is no destiny or twin souls; just two lines converging at the same point in time. There is nothing that makes someone more special than another person, but our will. We are elementally animals and we used to couple randomly, but with awareness and technology comes more responsibility. Today,

we can meet our perfect match; we don't need to rely on chance and romance to meet our ideal partner. Romance is just a way to justify poor decision-making, through nostalgia and self-deception. Our partners are not more handsome, smarter, or nicer than other people's spouses, but there is the added value given by our having chosen them, and there is the fondness created by proximity. In the past, many people used to wait until something in their hearts clicked, and they called this: falling in love, but we know better now. We could leave it to chance and wait till we fall in love with a coworker or friend, and maintain that relationship through romantic mechanisms such as nostalgic memories and notions of fidelity. But it's more efficient to start with the best pick and see if there is a personality match from there, since personality cannot be replaced by looks. Also, there is a limit to the responsibilities of a partner. Conviviality is easily achieved in a relationship through tolerance and focus on a common goal of building a family. But the best possible outcomes are provided by the app, even in the case of casual relationships, because the algorithm makes room for every level of commitment. And given the fact that we dispose of a great amount of leisure time, the urge for sex and love does never catch us off guard, because we can easily provide for it with the help of the app. Today, there is no single person who's lonely because of the lack of a match; there are only solitary people who prefer being single.

This has also to do with the concept of beauty we have today. Sexual appeal is the result of our chemical balance. The eyes reflect the soul and the outer beauty reflects the inner beauty. We've learned to look for the right signs. In the past, some people yearned for hypertrophied muscles and organs and protruding features, while now we are attracted to signs of healthiness, fertility and resiliency, such as proportionally wide hips in women and leanness in general in men and women, which is a sign of good metabolism. The fat gene has become obsolete in today's society, where we get all our daily nutrients without exception. Genetic engineering and a good diet have uprooted obesity from our gene pool.

Genetic eugenics was de facto implemented as soon as the technology facilitating it was widely available. The majority of people simply opted for designer babies to give their progeny the best possible chance in life. Some people still opted out of this choice, sometimes giving birth to babies with some deficiencies. However, these genetic leftovers weren't enough to prevail in the global genetic pool, and they eventually started dying out. We still have unwanted genes today, besides the new mutant genes constantly appearing

in utero, which we mostly nip in the bud, unless we deem them harmless to the owner. There have been several innocuous mutations, similar to vitiligo or albinism, which gave a few people today patched skin and even a greenish hue, or gave others a purple or reddish eye color. There have also been enhancing mutations, which gave some people higher physical endurance, more resilience to weather phenomena, and more capacity to breathe air with low oxygen density. One of the most positive mutations that occurred was osteoplasticity, which gave people more flexible and less fragile bones. Although it happened on Earth, it was replicated on most Martians to make them more adaptable to their planet's gravity. There were also some mistakes in the case of genes that brought about undesirable mutations, which were nonetheless genetically corrected after birth. One of the most conspicuous ones was the self-combustion gene, which gave people the capacity to concentrate their body heat in a place of their bodies to the point in which they could set something aflame or, in extreme cases, set themselves on fire. This capacity sometimes couldn't be controlled and it caused third-degree burns in some patients, who had to be genetically treated. Parents of newly conceived children mostly edit out this gene if it appears, to avoid inconveniences, since it doesn't really add to the owner's life. However, a similar mutation: metabolic hyperegulation, is not only allowed but sometimes even added to some fetuses, so they will be able to endure harsh climatic conditions. This is rarely the case on Earth, but it is quite common on Mars.

Religion has also been uprooted from our genes. We've learned to channel our God instinct. All prophets on whom religions were based were mere charlatans. Jesus, for instance, said: "You'll know the truth and the truth will set you free," which is accurate. But he also said: "I am the way and the truth and the life," which is incongruous with his first statement and not consistent with the nature of truth because the truth is intrinsically antidogmatic. Everyone has their own truth, and truth pervades everyone differently. Truth must be reasoned into; not accepted vertically. It is intellectual food that can't be force-fed but needs to be chewed and digested by each individual. But Jesus was right that only through truth can we be free. Searching for it is a constant process, and we give it up by accepting a certain religion, which is true in some ways, but it also perpetuates outdated conceptions of life. Besides, if god gave us all the answers, then there would be nothing else for us to do but die. Therefore, religions are intrinsically pessimistic; that's why they talk about the end of the world.

At the same time, religions are based on true principles, such as the principle of eternity. If someone were to try to change the past or alter the normal evolution of life, they could do it to a certain point, but ultimately nature decides whether to go on or give up and start anew. The end and new beginning of the universe can only be triggered by a great imbalance that nature cannot control. As we, humans, become more powerful, we'll be able to destabilize nature more and more, but we'll also become wise enough not to do it. However, our mere existence will one day be destabilizing enough for nature; the entropy will be so great that nature won't be able to cope with it and it will reset itself. This is how we understand the end of the world right now, and how we grasp the concept of the origin of the universe.

Chapter eight

(The Cosmic Microwave Background sound is heard for a few seconds before fading out.) I'm Valentine. When Efrain told me about this feed, I decided to say something. I talk daily with Efrain, but we don't see eye to eye, so I thought it incumbent to present my own perspective. I know that he'll kindly bequeath this message to preterity and I hope that, in the process, he'll get some new insight into my way of thinking.

I've been checking the watch the whole morning. It's late, but for what? It feels too early; as if I could sleep a couple more hours with no consequence whatsoever. Life is such a simple thing; it all boils down to the economy of energy. Why do plants grow toward the sun? Why do we only have a pair of eyes and hands, one heart and brain? Why do we laugh? Why is there a division of labor? Why do we only live once? All leads to the same answer. Sometimes we give out flares of energy, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Like now, for instance, how long can I keep up with my euphoria? I'll eventually go back to my psychological balance, no matter how lucky I get in life. That's the thing about happiness: we can feel it clearly during these transient periods of ecstasy or also feel its absence during a deep melancholy, but generally, we aren't aware of it, because it's our natural state of psychological economy. The brain does so much work during sleep to clean up the messes we get into and provide us with a blank slate to start our new days, and yet we keep on filling those slates with emotions instead of realizing that they are just a detriment to the essence of happiness: emptiness.

I've spent these morning hours of my idle life trying to come up with a letter for Milena. I feel the gap between us needs to be bridged. I know we have a strong connection, based on primeval attraction, but how to ease her qualms and quench the objections of society?

First I thought of making a poem for her, but no one appreciates poems nowadays. She told me that they are the worst way of closing the deal, an inefficient expense of emotions, a waste of intellect and time. "To be with someone you need to be whole," she said, "and not fractured into obscure sentiments. Showing someone your raw feelings is an abuse of intimacy. We're responsible for our feelings, the same as we are for our actions; so we can't just let them run wild, but we need to check them before we present them to others. Poems are for loners and not for people who mean to be happy." I agree with her on that, but I still like feeling my heart swell with poetry. She says that this hypertrophy of the heart is unhealthy, just like other outdated habits, such as drinking or smoking tobacco.

Today's drugs are mere psychotropic enhancers with no secondary or withdrawal effects, and only for medicinal purposes. Depressants such as alcohol aren't available almost anywhere, though once I drank a dose of sixty-five milliliters of distilled wine bought at a pharmacy. For a couple of minutes, it felt like dying; then I felt depressed, a mix of dark thoughts and apathy. But then, I got bolder, as if death didn't matter anymore; as if I'd been reborn from the ashes of my previous, petty self. Now I understand why it is so addictive. I yearned for more of this life elixir to be poured in my mouth; to gulp it and be engulfed by it. But the pharmacist had emphatically advised me against it, so I let my thirst for life die and my body go limp. I had to lie down and snooze off for a while. Such grandiose experience denied to our generation. I understand the risks but don't we all die after all? Milena said once that talks of death are a dead end, pun intended. She's like a gleeful flower and I feel like inapt mud at her feet, gradually sapping her nutrients. I put all my efforts into turning off this darkness of mine while I'm with her, but I wish that Milena, like a swamp orchid, could thrive in the swampiness of my soul. I wish to bridge the abyss between us, and therefore I wrote a poem, an Ave imperator to salute her, just when I'm about to die.

...And what's a verse but a complaint of the soul?

And a poem but a graceful deaf scream?

If not you, another; if not to suffer, why were we even born?

It's not in you, but in me, that a wild heart has been lost.

To find it, to hold on to it tight,

or let it beat out its tunes...

I was born with regression, a rare condition; not fun at all. They say my brain is built differently, the old-fashion way. My way of thinking is interesting to people; they find no fault in it, but I'm a little of a freak show. They get it, the same as they get why cats are naturally afraid of water, but they rarely make an emotional connection with me. I must confess that I, on the other hand, don't understand some of the logic behind their actions, and the homogeneity of values and behavior in society scares me. I know it didn't use to be like this. Values were subjective and society was partially kept together by conformism. But there's no conformism today, only communion of thoughts and feelings. It's as if humans had evolved towards a beehive. In evolutionary theory, this doesn't even make sense. Species evolve towards specificity and societies evolve towards division of labor and specialization. I would've thought that different professions would have different worldviews, but no; we all share a common core, as if joined by a telepathic force.

Unfortunately, I'm unplugged from this core, so I'm an outcast. There are some things I strongly disagree with and other things I simply don't understand. I also see things that no one else sees, but all these things are considered irrelevant by society. I'm unfocused, like a spectator who, during a football match, pays more attention to the players that aren't in possession of the ball. I know it's odd and even useless, but I can't help being futile. I'm not a bee; I can't see a clear purpose in my life, so why be efficient? I don't care who wins or loses the match; sometimes I don't enjoy football at all.

I live in isolation because I'm too antisocial for the rest of the people. I'm an extrovert, but I behave in a way that most people consider antisocial. After all, social consensus defines what's social and what's not, and I'm simply out of the spectrum. Although society concurs that I'm the odd one, to me the world is topsy-turvy and not I. I'm myself and can't deny my existence, nor conform to other people's reality. I simply see differently. I have a recurrent dream of being kidnapped. Someone breaks into my house and menacingly asks me to follow him or her. I can't know for sure because they are wearing a whole black suit with a metal helmet covering their whole face and even a cape. The figure is well built, but I can notice that shoulder pads contribute to that effect and I have no idea what's underneath the suit. The metallic voice has obviously been altered beyond recognition, or maybe it's just the nature of the dream that doesn't allow me to focus more on this detail. The more I want to know whether it's a man or a woman, the more indistinct it becomes, as if blurring into a unisex voice. It's very relevant to me whether

I'm kidnapped by a man or a woman, but my dream disagrees with me and it makes me enjoy my kidnap. "It's Stockholm syndrome," I want to shout, but the dream doesn't allow it. It just shows me how meticulously planned my kidnap was; how conscientious my kidnapper is. Yes, this person has an ultimately selfish goal, but I know nothing about it. Isn't that the same with every person? Don't we all have selfish goals that subconsciously drive our actions? Call them instincts or perversions, we're mostly guided by them. So what's Stockholm syndrome but emotional retribution towards someone who's boosted our egos with their extra attention? My insignificant self takes new dimensions with this kidnap. I become someone's center of attention; my behavior is relevant now, and not only my thoughts. This person only exists for me now, and I only exist for them. Oddly enough, I'm not tied up or even locked in my room. The door is sometimes even treacherously ajar and I close it so I don't have any chance to escape. I feel that if I leave it open, society will force me to leave the room and break my tacit agreement with the kidnapper: that this person trusts I won't escape. I feel them outside, asking themselves why this person kidnapped me, and I shout: "Goddammit! None of your business!" My kidnapper is unmoved by all the commotion and fills me with calmness. I've watched this person move gently but assertively around me, irradiating affection and care. I'm entranced, looking at their every move as if watching a choreography performed only for me. I feel even obliged to watch it all, out of gratefulness. This is when I realize that this person needs me as much as I need them. We're our karma and we don't need society to intervene with its mad rules about motives and purposes. Now I see clearly, when this person looks at me in the eye, that they're simply existing by my side; that the whole kidnapping thing was just a ruse to deceive others, but not me. I see through it all.

Chapter Nine

We went on a two-month trip to Japan with Erin. In today's globalization, cultural differences have blurred, besides touristic idiosyncrasies that are kept alive for fun's sake. To make up for it, landscapes and architecture are very varied throughout the world, emulating the pristine state of the land, wherever possible, and maintaining the historic accuracy of facades and landmarks. This is not as hard as it seems, since history ended in the twenty-third century, with the settlement of Mars. There have been no more hiccups from then on, so building new landmarks was no longer needed. There have been no more heroes or antiheroes, only people dedicated to the betterment of society or to fulfilling their egotistic goals. In any way, these two paths never collided, but they both provided for fruitful lives, whether they were led extrovertedly or introvertedly. The same as there have been no more heroes in the political arena, there have been no more celebrities in the cultural milieu. Art is still very alive, but there are no more trends anymore. Society reached a peak in individualism in the twenty-fourth century and has not descended since then. Fame and authority are still current, and some people are more talented, aware, sharp or skillful than others and they are subsequently emulated, but only by people with similar interests. No one is unduly famous anymore, as it used to be back in your time. Since society has stopped yielding to the mechanics of favoritism and privilege, there are no advantages to fame anymore, only to talent and skill.
A two-month vacation twice a year is the average nowadays. It's enough time to get immersed in the environment and involved in the local society. Actually, to your standards, this would rather be called volunteering, since people today generally lend a hand wherever they go on holidays to connect themselves, instead of simply idling their time away. Erin is a doctor, so she gave some free check-ups, especially to the

immortals, who seemed to abound in this region. I got interested in the local fauna, which, to be honest, was the reason we came here in the first place. At the local park, I got to tend to a great variety of animals I'd never encountered before, including two that were on my must-see list: the crested ibis and the Tsushima leopard cat. As much as I missed my horses, I was sad when the two months were over, but the zookeeper told me I could fly back anytime I wish and he would be sure to find me something to do around.

But we did more than work for two months. Sightseeing is still a popular activity today, and Japan has very intricate architecture due to the demands of the land. It was a pleasure to see the reinforced earthquake-resistant structures. The wave-breaking structures on the shores are one of a kind and the lava traps around volcanoes look really science-fictional, even to my futuristic eyes. I must clarify that this country has been consistently depopulated for the last millennia, and today it counts only twenty million inhabitants. This leaves plenty of room for wildlife, which must, nevertheless, be still protected against dangerous natural events, nevertheless.

Japan has the distinction of being one of the few countries to have reclaimed land from the sea. During the Great Flood at the end of your current century, twenty percent of Japan's land was claimed by the sea. Unfortunately, that meant most of the Japanese cities were submerged in water. This happened all around the world, and most countries decided to rebuild their civilizations on higher land, but Japan didn't have much of an option. They created a system of dams and pumps, which in a matter of decades allowed them to drain the water from most of their land, claiming it back from the sea. Also, because they had braced themselves for the Great Flood, preparing their cities for the imminent catastrophe, their buildings weren't completely damaged by the incoming seawater, so they didn't have to rebuild everything, like other countries did. In this way, the protective measures taken before the flood, combined with the system of dams implemented in the aftermath, were immensely more economical than the measures taken by other countries to fix the damages caused by the natural disaster. Today, Japan, together with just a few more countries, such as The United Kingdom, Ireland, the Bahamas, Singapore, Bahrain, Holand, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Taiwan, South Korea and Malta, are the only countries that decided to venture into exhaustive land reclamation. This means that most of the populated area of these countries is now below sea level, protected by a waterproof system of dams and pumps. Today, we have the technology to implement a global project of global land reclamation by freezing great amounts of water

at uninhabitable places near the poles and covering them with a layer of reflecting material, which would prevent them from melting. The Antarctic, for instance, was populated by many nations after the Great Flood. It became an independent country, made up of refugees from all around the world. However, from the beginning of the fourth millennium, it has been increasingly depopulated because of the short sunshine duration, going from one hundred million inhabitants in the twenty-third century to just six million migratory citizens today. Migratory citizens are another phenomenon of our era. These are people who live in a place during its sunny period and then go to a secondary place of residence, just to come back six months later. These seasonal migrations are generally done in groups, so the societies don't lose their cohesiveness. Children remain in touch with their playmates, adolescents with their teen loves and friends, and adults with their colleagues, friends and clients.

Most of Japan, like many other regions of the world, has become a big natural reserve and tourist attraction, also due to its interesting history. Interactive museums abound everywhere, and Japan is no exception. We got immersed in Japan's history. I was a samurai and Efrin was a ninja for a whole day, and we fought warlord wars in the Sengoku period. The next day, Erin tried being a geisha, but she didn't enjoy it that much, so we both became Pokemon trainers for a day. I loved it. These fantastic animals truly reflected the uniqueness of the Japanese fauna and, again, I was sad when Erin told me it was fun, but she didn't want to repeat the experience the next day. We decided to split for a day and she went sightseeing, while I played a little more Pokemon, but the next day I joined her because I didn't want to miss out on other activities, such as the visit to Mount Fuji. I got my own Pokeball and Pokemon, however. I picked Charmeleon because it seemed to be a good representative of this magnificent land of dragons. The Pokeball is a simple ball made with computronium, which endows it with intelligent functions, such as opening itself when thrown, either releasing or retrieving a Pokemon and returning to my hand afterward. The Pokemon, however, is a holoanimation, which is a fully sensorial hologram created by a unit of nanorobots. This unit can orchestrate visual, auditory and tactile effects. Although they're harmless, they can provoke some dangerous reactions in people, so Pokemons are forbidden to people without proper training. My years of zoological studies and horse training have granted me a green card to be a Pokemon owner after just a week-long crash course on Pokemon handling, which I took in the mornings, while Erin gave free checkups. Charmeleon's algorithm is very complex, since

it comprises the behavior of several indigenous lizards, with fantastic characteristics historically attributed to dragons. It can actually throw fireballs, whose holographic flames can illusorily ignite flammable objects they touch, extinguishing themselves after a few seconds. It wasn't cheap, but it will surely provide me with hours of entertainment.

When making decisions, we mostly follow the principle of pleasure. Stoicism and other similar philosophical currents are outdated nowadays, since life is not a source of suffering anymore, but an infinite source of pleasure. True, people still die, but it's also true that we don't get attached emotionally as much as people from your era. This is not Buddhism or any sort of spiritual enlightenment, but simple awareness of our solitude. We're single entities that happen to converge from time to time, but we never lose our individuality. If a raindrop falls into the sea, it appears to be lost, but if that raindrop is self-aware, when it evaporates it regains its identity. It may be changed; it may keep some sea molecules as a souvenir, but it's still the same raindrop. Especially when it comes to relationships, the principle of pleasure is always followed to decide whether to remain with someone or not. There are no ideal partners but only good enough partners. That is, we don't idealize anyone but love with our eyes open. If someone is attractive enough so as not to trigger our instinctive roving eye, and if they are interesting and kind enough to make for a bearable coexistence, we stick to them; otherwise, we keep on looking. But Valentine would have none of it. He argued that what makes someone special is that you bestow on them your attention, that you choose them to be special. This is, clearly, circular reasoning, which doesn't bear the slightest scrutiny, because in that case, anyone can be special, which renders everyone inconspicuous. However idiosyncratic attraction might be, it is still beyond our control, so our decision to bestow our attention on someone is always based on feelings and not the other way around. Valentine's statement is nevertheless partially true: no one is special by themselves, but we make them so when we choose them. It's the same as with The Mona Lisa: It may be a wonderful painting, but it's nothing if there's no light to make it observable. The only issue with Valentin's view is that it focuses only on our power to give and take back freely the gift of our attention, ignoring our natural and acquired inclinations.

On a different note, Milena broke up with Valentin. It was bound to happen, but Valentin seems not to accept this fact. They could've had a chance at happiness if he'd toned down his romanticism, which in fact worsened when he met her. He seemed to be boycotting his happiness, and, honestly, it was a sad view to see. I only know about it only from what

Valentin told me, but the way he told it was the major hint about his state. He was completely unhinged, more than usual. Now I know exactly why seclusion is recommended for people with regression. Generally, meeting someone is a good catalyst for regular people. They become more integrated with society and develop new long-term goals for their lives. Biologically, it also triggers hormonal changes that boost psychological evolution. Having been in a sexual relationship, therefore, has always a positive effect, except in cases of emotional or psychological imbalance, like Valentin's. Because, even after it is over, there remains the momentum given by our previous rush of emotions. If the frustration and apathy inherent to any breakup are neutralized, this momentum can be properly channeled into a moment of great beauty or genius.

As soon as I came back from vacation, I went to see him in person. I admit I didn't keep in touch while on vacation, except for the exchange of a few messages, one of which informed me that he and Milena had stopped seeing each other two weeks before I came back to Posnan. From my theoretical knowledge about regression, I expected him to be upset when I came back, but his state exceeded my expectations: He was totally disturbed, as if he'd caught some ancient viral disease. His emotions were like the feverish reaction to viruses we used to have before modern medicine. I believe this sort of behavior to be very rare: a product of the combination of Valentin's regressed condition and his idealistic character.

I tried to cheer him up but he was inconsolable, just like a kid who is denied candy for breakfast. I tried to make sensibility seep into his brain, telling him that it had been all fair and square; they had dated and she had decided to break it up; that he shouldn't take it personally that she had seen it before him that the relationship wouldn't work out, because sooner or later he would surely have seen it too; that he should focus on the positive: the thrill he'd gotten from the relationship, the emotions that surely catalyzed his personality for the better. After all, life is nothing without emotions, whether good or bad. For all we know, that's the only thing real: feelings. Back in the day philosophers used to pose the questions: Do we exist or are we a figment of our imagination? Is anything real? And what is reality? These apparently vain questions hold a grain of truth: We can only apprehend reality with our senses, and therefore reality is malleable to our subjective perception. A rainbow may be a magical event to a kid, while it's a mere weather phenomenon to grown-ups; an ancient sculpture may be a wonderful piece of art and history for a person, while it's just misshaped marble to another one. Today, we're as

aware of the subjectivity of the human mind as people were in the past, but we don't let our senses take over our intellect. I tried to make Valentin look objectively at his situation, beyond his emotional perception, but he was adamant in his sorrow. He embraced his self-pity the same as a martyr embraces the cause that kills him. But we don't believe in martyrdom nowadays; it's repugnant to our sensibility. This deprecation of life's intrinsic value is unethical today, and it's one of the clearest signs of regression. The same as in the past people used to shorten their lives with narcotics, bad habits and a poor diet, Valentin was trying to waste his by pining after a woman that he wasn't meant to be with.

His folly, however, was highly intellectual. He argued back my view of subjectivity, saying that the same as our imagination has created technology and art, our mind can control our feelings and change our future, and, however unapparent a future between him and Milena was right now, if both commit to it, it could be possible. I explained to him that technology and art are rather the product of inspiration than imagination; that we react to nature and life when producing technology and art, and therefore our imagination is also a byproduct of being alive. The same as a hornero imagines the nest it's building, we imagine paintings, music, buildings and technology. We're a tool of nature, as much as a tornado is; only we are aware of our existence. The Greeks had it clear with their myths of heroes that went against fate, that is, the will of nature. But, unfortunately, hedonism and the cult of the ego made people recklessly think that everything was possible if they only set their minds and heart to it. I told him that his crusade against the current situation between him and Milena was sure to bring him only discontent since, even if he succeeded in winning over her affection, it would be at the price of his peace of mind. The imbalance of affection can't be overcome with effort, but only by distancing yourself from the other person. The mechanics of attraction work in such a way that the more effort you put into attracting someone, the less positive results you get. That is why we have evolved towards a facility to withdraw emotionally from people they aren't completely satisfied with, since this leads to more fruitful coupling with the right person.

Chapter Ten

(The Cosmic Microwave Background sound is heard as if tuning into a new radio station and then fades out as the narrator speaks.)

The year is four thousand, four hundred and twenty-two, and life as you know it has ceased to exist. Many argue that we live in paradise, that this is heaven on Earth, but that leads to the simple counter-argument: To go to heaven, one needs to die first.

In my time, I'm a scientist, which also means I'm a philosopher. Today, science and philosophy are one again, since the scientific process has come full circle. The scission between philosophy and science and the subsequent branching out of the different scientific areas ended more than a thousand years ago, in the period called: The Enlightened Dark Age. During this period, the end of science was declared, since there was no more to be apprehended through our senses. There was a resurgence of abstract theorizing to try to make sense of all the information we possessed. We were done with the dissection of reality, since we had measured it till its nano-quarks. Now, it is all about trying new perspectives and looking for new interpretations of life and the universe. That is how we were able to break the reality-time continuum and speak to you from the future. The necessary technology was there all along, but we couldn't grasp it before, the same as Homo sapiens always had the means to speak, but they simply didn't see their mouths as speech tools until some individuals realized that, besides eating and kissing, the mouth was also useful for making noises.

To explain how you're able to receive a message that was recorded two thousand years from the moment you're reading it, let's think about the phenomenon called memory. You may think you know what memories are from the fact that you possess them and maybe you've heard or read about memory loss and its intricacies. But have you ever wondered what memories are from an ontological point of view? For instance, have you ever asked yourself the simple question: Are my memories real or a mere figment of my imagination? The answer to this question is: Memories are not real, although they're based on reality. But so are films and books, and every form of art basically. However, in your time, there is a clear distinction between fiction and reality, between Superman and Adolf Hitler. One never existed and the other one is as real as the person lying right now beside you in bed, or aren't they? This might sound odd to you, but the historical Hitler isn't real; he's only based on the real one. The real Hitler had more thoughts and feelings than the ones written down in history books. The center

of Hitler's existence lay in Hitler's mind, and maybe to himself he wasn't a genocide or a manipulator, but a loving husband, a pet lover, an idealist and a gifted politician with great ambitions for his country. I'm just hypothesizing here; I don't pretend to know what Hitler felt, since it wasn't recorded. The same can even be said of your partners or friends. The image you have of them is only fictional because you cannot grasp their full identity in your mind. But let's go back to memories. You remember vividly that day when you were married or you had a terrible accident. The wedding day was beautiful, sunny and with a radiant rainbow to top it off, but wait a minute: How come there was a rainbow on a sunny day? Was it really sunny all the time or you just forgot the shower that drenched some of your guests? Or maybe you just didn't notice it, since the euphoria blocked out all those small inconveniences. Or maybe you do have perfect memory and you do remember every detail of your wedding, or maybe you recorded it all, but… Did you record it as being the happiest day of your life? Or as being the beginning of a strenuous path toward your late divorce? Do you consider your wedding to be a hiatus in your unhappiness, or the source of all your current evils? Or, if you're still happily married to that person, are you both the same people that got married that day or have you changed together with your love for each other? Isn't watching your wedding video from ten years ago just like watching a movie where the actors look like younger versions of yourselves? Don't your current emotions inform your interpretation of the images you're watching? Those images that look so real, are they real, or are they simply ghosts of the past?

What I aim at showing you in this way is that memories are built on memories, not on reality. Just like Allan Poe put it once: Life is but a dream within a dream. We can't actually grasp reality, or life, and all our attempts are in vain. We can only dream and create memories that are replicas of life, but not life itself. From the moment we create a memory, our subjectivity comes into play. The memory of a child is not the same as that of a mother, though the event was the exact same. And not only that. My memory today would differ from a memory I would create were the same thing to happen to me tomorrow. Because life's nature is change, and memories change with us. Our interpretation of past events changes with us, and thus we change our pasts as we learn new things about ourselves or the world.

Let's break up the process of memory formation: First, you interpret an event and create a replica in your head. Then, you remember this replica, or you re-watch it, changing its interpretation each time. Depending on how many times you view this memory, you're left simply with a memory of a memory of a memory, so distant from the reality that inspired it that it might as well be a paragraph in your favorite novel. This process is called: memory construction and its opposite is called: memory deconstruction, which consists in changing our past through its reinterpretation. This is the task that has been given to me: retro-progress. By tampering with the reality-time continuum, I'm able to imbue or inspire a recording from the past, as if the person giving the speech had had a revelation. But please remember a basic physical law: Nothing is created nor destroyed, but everything is transformed. Therefore, any epiphany, however novel may seem, is the product of reality. Basically speaking, no thought has never been thought before, but its

form and perspective are the only things that change, the same as an image changes the closer we get to it. And because currently, we are able to break the linear continuum of information transmission, I can retro-transmit thoughts, which is the purpose of this broadcast.

The world today is a technological paradise: Technology and values have converged in a society that respects nature and progress. The early social dichotomies: Communism versus capitalism, ecology versus industrial progress, and even body versus soul have all been bridged. Technology today is used to enhance nature, not to destroy it, and by helping it, we help human progress. But this trend, called nature technology, already became preponderant by the end of your current century, when the spontaneous combustion of many forests around the globe and the flooding of major coastal cities due to the melting of the ice caps veered the path of industrialization. All technology became eco-friendly at the beginning to gradually become completely ecological, that is, contributing to nature. The paradigm changed from technology being used to shape nature to our needs to it being used to adjust our needs to nature.

I could spend days explaining one single technological advancement; however, that's not the task I was given, but a more ambitious one: to spark a radical mental change in your generation. I mentioned that the ice caps melted, raising the sea level by sixty-five meters, but this is only a contingency. In life, there are certain and contingent facts. A certain fact is that all living beings die, including human beings. A contingent fact is that I die from a car accident or from heart failure in my sleep. Thanks to our current technology, we have been able to prevent all undesirable contingencies from happening in the present, and my project is to start preventing them retroactively, that is, in the past. This is done by providing you with the information necessary to change your current way of thinking and actions. It's an arduous task since evolution can't be forced and the organism needs to be ready physically and mentally to change, which means that you need the technology and the proper mentality to be able to embrace change.

Supposing that you do embrace the change I'll propose, what effect will this alteration have in my present? This question has already partially been answered by my explanation of how memory works. No one in my present will lose their memory, and none of their lives will change drastically. Now, let's clarify the concept of drastic change. If a person were to become your neighbor tomorrow, and if you were to meet them and fall in love with them, will it mean that their moving in next door was a drastic change in your life?

The correct answer is no because this moving in is a mere contingency; the certain fact is that you were ready to fall in love and you were consciously or subconsciously looking for a partner, which you would've found at work, in the street or on the Internet anyways. What seems to you to be so necessary, their moving in next door is a mere contingency. The same would happen were you to avoid the melting of the ice caps. Buenos Aires, New York, Amsterdam, Saint Petersburg, Hong Kong and many other cities would simply reappear in my present time, the same as your neighbor appeared next door. The people living there would have commercial links with the rest of us, the same as if we had acquired new partners. However, at the beginning, there wouldn't be any personal links between them and us, the same as there was no link between you and your neighbor when they just moved in. That's the meaning of no radical changes. None of the people already living will die or see their past affected by the appearance of all these new people. Of course, these people would affect their future, the same as a wave of refugees changes the future of any country. When it comes to information, all records would account for these new people, which means, they will be automatically added to all our systems. The only thing that will prove that they didn't exist before would be our memories. But by now we know how flaky our memories are. Our social need for adaptation to reality would discard these obsolete memories and adapt to the new reality. Of course, someone could obstinately argue that New Yorkers are not real and that we should kill them all, but that's not really how our current society works. In the present, we embrace change and evolution; we don't try to hinder it. That is also why we believe this project is possible now: because both you and we are ready to carry it out.

The hardest thing for every activist is to talk about hunger to people who have bread. Although the melting of the ice caps is a huge catastrophe, which will directly affect half of the global population, it will never be imminent enough to start a revolution on time. The fact that this catastrophe will take place gradually, like a pot slowly reaching the boiling point, creates negligence on the part of the people that already know that will be affected, but don't know exactly when and to what extent. Also, like in every crisis, the people who become aware in advance can simply take advantage, for instance selling their property in vulnerable places and escaping while there's still time. But this is not what I'm trying to achieve here, so believe me when I tell you that my task is really hard. What I want is to raise awareness and appeal to the humanity of enough people, so changes can be done on time. It might even sound god-like arrogant to try to prevent

natural forces from flooding us, but we've already tampered with nature for the worse, so we might now do it for the better. Those who built their houses on the sand, but also those who built their houses on the stone, would have to embrace our new role as architects of Earth for no other reason than their love for humanity and nature.

Although innumerable species will get extinct in this catastrophe, and many people will fall into poverty, it is still a mere contingency, which could be caused by some other factor, such as a global nuclear war, which would actually be way more disastrous. Fortunately, your society is evolving at a rate that will soon overcome the danger of a global nuclear war. This is a clear example of society catching up with technology, as opposed to the industrial revolution, for instance, which created so many social issues. To be completely honest, whatever particular men do has little significance for humanity as a whole. Thinking of the worst-case scenario: A global conflagration or a pandemic that wipes out half of the world would only slow down the inevitable evolution of our species towards harmony with each other, technology and nature. As individuals, we're free, but as a species, we have a destiny to which we'll inevitably arrive. Going back to the most optimistic scenario of New York and other cities reemerging from the seas: This would not kill or harm any of the people already living on Earth because they are already predestined to be alive. Here we get into a metaphysical subject: Scientists have discovered that birth, the same as death, is a certain fact in everyone's lives. This means that people are never born by chance; actually chance does not exist in nature, or as Einstein said: God doesn't play dice. There is a metaphysical force governing nature and pushing living beings forward. We can tamper with nature all we want, but we can't make evolution come to a halt. From previous, small-scale tampering with the past which was done, it was discovered this has no influence on living people's present, as if life's equation was rebooted with each of these manipulations of the time continuum until it equaled zero again. That is to say: The past and the future can be changed, but not the present.

Let me put this more clearly in an example: If after reading this you were to find out my genealogy and kill one of my ancestors to try to erase me from my present existence, I would simply be born from other parents. You would change my past, but not my present. In some way, the invisible force governing nature would zero this change out, leading me to achieve the same situation in my current life. This law of balance has already been seen by scientists of your time, who discovered that different species arrived at the

evolution of the same organs through different paths. That's why both a fly and a human being have eyes, although they come from a common ancestor that was blind. Animals are predetermined to sense their environment and the best possible way is through the evolution of eyes. But there is an organ even more important than the eyes to sense the environment: the brain. And there is another element even more important than the brain: our consciousness, whose memory remains in the coding of nature until it is again apprehended by someone's mind. This metamemory can remain dormant for eternity, but that doesn't mean it ceases to exist. It just means it's been transformed into something else, further affecting the fabric of reality.

Now to the task in question: To try to dissuade you from collaterally destroying the Earth. You aren't doing it on purpose; no one is accusing you of evil doing. But think of the nature of evil. Let's take the paradigm of evil: the devil. He simply rebelled against God, the same as the French rebelled against Louis XVI. Evil is rebellion against the status quo, and it's therefore subjective. To Louis XVI, his murderous crowd was pure evil, the same as Lucifer was to God. So, to nature, you are evil, the same as cancer is to us. And the main problem is that nature is not something extrinsic to us: we are natural beings too; so the more we damage nature, the more we damage ourselves. It may seem counter-intuitive, but the ecological issue is actually a humanitarian issue. The real question is not whether we need to take care of nature, which is already evident from any logical point of view, but whether we, humans, are evil by nature. If we can answer this question, we won't be at such a loss regarding our role in life and the world as a species anymore.

The self-preservation instinct led to many horrors, such as wars and holocausts. From the logical point of view, we can say that humans are born evil; our natural state is evil to outsiders, that is, to people from other tribes. Empathy and humanism are the product of nurture, and they need to be adopted by every person to become fully human. This is a socio-psychological truth nowadays, and the basis of our current society. As with all other truths, this one is subject to debunking, but for the time being, it has become our reality. It basically means that people who haven't adopted humanistic principles are correspondingly treated as not fully human and therefore granted fewer rights than the rest of us. We've labeled these people as regressed, that is, people who are regressing in values, going back to the core of humanity, to try to reach our ancestral, primeval instincts. We value them as a means to improve our humanity, because instincts make us what we are and it's very important not to lose touch with them, but we also see the

danger lying in them, so we cannot allow them to run completely free. This is why, in such a liberal society as ours, there is a caveat for a group of people who cannot simply be allowed to interact with society freely. They are not inmates, however; we don't believe in depriving people of their physical liberty. Prisons were outlawed more than a thousand years ago in the whole world. Nevertheless, there is voluntary confinement for people who need it, always taking into account that it's been psychologically proven that free will is the most important step in any psychological cure.

Besides, with our current technology, we don't need to confine potentially dangerous people anymore because we count with numerous satellites and tracking systems that allow us to know who is in our periphery at all times. Stealing is not an option anymore, and physical damage to others or yourself is practically impossible due to the nanorobots present in every human habitat or in halo suits that can be carried on trips to natural habitats, such as forests. Of course, suicide is allowed, so can go to the forest and kill themselves before nanorobots could prevent it, or they can simply invoke the right to euthanasia. Even among the highest-risk group, the regressed, we haven't yet seen a case of dangerous physical violence, although we often see cases of socially disruptive behavior. That's why these people are advised to isolate themselves as much as possible from the rest of society. It's not treated as a punishment, because they aren't guilty of being born like that, but as a treatment to be followed if they want to get better. There have been a few cases of regressed people who have refused treatment and chosen to follow their own advice, but they encountered positive discrimination on the part of the rest of the people who wanted to avoid the danger of meeting them. I will tell you the story of one of these people, and maybe this will enlighten you a little about our human nature and how to cope with it.

I haven't introduced myself yet, I'm Conrad, and I'm a hundred and twenty years old. I'm a senior, which makes me wise, but not old. People live up to two hundred nowadays. The story I want to tell you about has become a sort of legend among us. It's such a cautionary tale that it's used in groundbreaking psychological and sociological studies. From my philosophical point of view, I'll give you an interpretation of this story, together with what to my understanding are the most important facts. The protagonists of this story are a young man with regression called Valentine and a young woman called Milena. They were both born with the right to be happy, but when they met they suffered from what in psychology is known as the Romeo and Juliet complex: a vehement desire to

carry out a relationship despite social boundaries. The boundaries between Romeo and Juliet were unfair to the lovers but necessary, due to the danger incurred by a relationship between foes. All sorts of relationships have as a frame the society in which the individuals live, so it's impossible to obviate social boundaries without renouncing the society in question. Romeo and Juliet's problem was that they couldn't manage to renounce their society alive. Valentin and Milena's problem is more complex: They could've renounced society and lived self-sufficiently, but the existent social boundary forbidding regressed people from becoming partners with regular people has a psychologically-founded reason: that people with such a pronounced difference in their level of intellectual development can't form an equal relationship.

Most of what we know about the couple comes from a direct witness called Efrain, as well as from Valentin's psychologist. From all their psychotherapy sessions, I picked these words uttered by Valentine as an introduction to his frame of mind at the moment:

(After a couple of seconds of background microwave sound, Valentin starts talking.)

"*Have you ever looked at someone in the street with imagination, imagining they are someone dear to you, that you're connected to that stranger and it's not only by chance that you're found at the same place at that moment? Have you wondered how easy it would be for that person to become dear to you? How long it would take: five minutes, three months, ten years? What kind of figment disconnects us from the rest of the world? What makes that person someone other than me? What divides us from one another are rather our minds than our bodies. I could never be that girl I'm seeing because she thinks other thoughts. I could control her body and see through her eyes, but I wouldn't see the same things. We're so similar, but so different; so connected, but so disconnected from one another.*"

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Those kinds of idle thoughts are typical in regression. We deal with facts today; imagination is a useless tool if not put to a purpose. If you can imagine how something can come to be, how this girl you're seeing can become your girlfriend, then it is positive imagination, but thinking about ifs and not doing anything about it is negative imagination, very dangerous, the kind that led people to free their minds with psychotropics in the past. These "what ifs": "What if… all we need is love, what if… war didn't exist" are detrimental to progress. We don't have war today because we imagined it positively,

realistically. We imagined the end of violent conflict and implemented it. We imagined peace and now it exists. So while imagination is highly valued, the same as the knowledge of how to create fire is valued, we need to learn to control this skill or we'll become dangerous to ourselves and others.

About Milena there's not much to say as an introduction, except for a phrase she once said to a witness:

(Two seconds of microwave background radiation sound)

"I value diversity so much that I buy different kinds of groats, even though I have a favorite one. Because if I didn't have the option to constantly choose among different groats, my favorite ones would stop being special. They would simply become groats, and I would still love groats, but then I wouldn't have any choice, the same as we don't have a choice but to breathe air. By buying groats that I like less than my favorite ones, I make my favorite groats special."

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We could say she was an idealist who embraced regression, although she didn't have this condition herself. Unfortunately, she took this conviction to an emotional level when she got engaged in a relationship with Valentin. In doing so, she broke the principle of falling in love conscientiously, which is legally binding today, the same as driving responsibly is in your time. Irresponsible relationships are punished, the same as drunk driving is in your society. However, our punishments are not prescriptive like yours; they just represent the value given to the status quo. To put it simply, our punishments do not seek to deter people from committing crimes, because freedom is paramount in today's society, and the fact that certain actions are considered crimes because they're dangerous to society does not mean that they are morally wrong. That's why people like Milena, who commit crimes, pay their penalty willingly to make up for the social damage they've potentially incurred. In Milena's case, the crime was so severe that she had to give up her regular rights and adopt the rights of a regressed person, which imply living in relative isolation and being unable to perform certain social activities. But now, let's delve into the story to see if we can learn more about human nature.

Chapter Eleven

Conrad's insight into the future came as a surprise to me. As I was recording this message, I expected Valentine's interference, but I never expected to have a feed from the near future. From Conrad's message, I surmise that the situation I bumped into has more repercussions for humanity than I'd previously calculated. I'm happy to say I'm proud of myself. Few things are relevant in today's world, among them new knowledge and the opportunity to be able to discover it. So as not to steal my thunder and, more importantly, not to spoil the ending, Conrad has only redone an introduction to the subject and has left me the clues to unravel this story by myself, so I'm now even more encouraged to do so. Unfortunately, Milena is nowhere to be found; she simply vanished in thin air. However, I did receive from Conrad all the recordings from the compulsory psychotherapeutic sessions she starts in two weeks and which will last almost one year, after which she will be discharged and go back to her normal life until, eventually, she'll resume her relationship with Valentin.

Let me now share the things she said during her sessions which may shed light on her decision to go back to him. But, firstly, I must clarify that Milena will consent to disclose this information, which would otherwise be strictly confidential. This consent is merely a formality since we believe in the free flow of information nowadays, but still, because the psychological health of a person is at stake, the information will be handled carefully and a warning will be triggered any time Milena is about to see or hear something related to her future self. This is a common feature today because some of the things we say or do are fed back when they're relevant to the development of humanity. When it comes to scientific discoveries or other feats, they're freely divulged, which means that today's geniuses are famous from birth for something they'll create or discover in their future, but in the case of sensitive information, such as conversations or facts about someone's personal life, an algorithm is used to regulate their access it. Of course, the protagonists of the feed have the right to access information about their future private life if they want, but other people have no access to any form of register of these events, and word of mouth has stopped being a reliable source of information. Today we have a short memory span since our brains have specialized in analyzing information, not holding it.

Whether Milena learns about events in her life beforehand or not, it's her decision, and actually, we don't know for sure if she read about her story with Valentin before meeting him or not, because she never talked about it to any witnesses who went on record. In Valentin's case, the question is simpler: He doesn't have any access to files about his future. That is another reason for the isolation regressed people live in: for their protection against things they can't cognitively handle, such as the knowledge of their future. This is no mere theory; a long time ago, some regressed people learned about their future from psychological works, and they couldn't handle the information. Most of them showed an increase in erratic behavior and apathy toward life, just as if someone had spoiled the film of their lives for them. To normal people, however, knowing about their future is not detrimental to their lives, since today we know that the journey is the only thing that matters. The ending has always been known to humans, but also landmarks in our lives are quite predictable: Getting married, having kids, and also finally having a breakthrough at something we undertake with passion and seriousness. So to us, knowing what we're going to achieve doesn't take away from the fact that we still need to achieve it. The same as a good book can't be spoiled by reading its ending, our lives today don't lose their appeal when we learn about things in our future, since we enjoy

every detail appertaining to how we get there. The means are more important to us than the end. Nonetheless, few people can find feedback on their lives, since retrotransmission is a technology that needs to be painstakingly implemented to properly work. That means that the feeds that we send or receive are only about events that affect the whole society, and not mere individuals.

My ignorance was actually a bliss, that is, I'm lucky I hadn't heard about Valentine before meeting him; otherwise, my relationship with him would've been hindered by the moral and legal responsibility not to accidentally tell him anything about his future. As I mentioned before, we have a very short memory span nowadays, which doesn't mean that we carry less information with us. We can access data literally in the blink of an eye and look up any information while we walk, drive or even talk to someone. Artificial intelligence notifies us of the most relevant facts we need during a speech or at work. Imagine a thought checker, which, similar to a spellchecker, corrects our mistakes, but also prompts us with relevant facts and information needed to better perform our thought processes. In the case of sensitive information, while it's blocked to any other than the person concerned, it might leak from other sources, such as psychological research. So lucky me, I'm not generally interested in psychology, or I would surely have heard about this proverbial love relationship.

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(The Cosmic Microwave Background sound is heard for a few seconds and it fades out as Milena speaks.)

"I rejected him to give him back his freedom because to love is to sacrifice your desire. Love is a moral obligation when you find the right person, and to love is to die for someone else than yourself. If someone rejects your love, they're simply granting you back your freedom to go back to being selfish or to renounce your selfishness for a higher end: humanity, art or nature. Valentin is simply too wild to be contained in the frame of a relationship; I don't think we have the social construct that answers his needs. It hurt me deeply to let him go, the same as it hurts to release a wild beast from captivity once this animal has become dear to us."

"Do you associate love with death?"

"In some sense… but just like committing hara-kiri before being certainly killed by someone else. Love is choosing how to die. Isn't it?"

"True, but what about redemptive love? The love that leads to the perpetuation of life. You talk about freedom, but aren't we condemned to live? Do you think the best solution is to kill ourselves instead of further promoting life?"

"I see your point, and I'll probably find a way to further promote life, but for now I have strong, self-destructive feelings for Valentine. I have hopes for him, and that's the most difficult part. I expect him to snap out of his recession and be able to be happy with me, but I also contemplate the dangerous option of giving up my intellectual apprehensions to try and live unconsciously happy with him, as if the drunkenness of our feelings sufficed to our happiness."

"That's a very healthy feeling, despite your prejudices. It's healthy to know when to let go of your intellect. We've evolved toward reason and logic, but feelings are far from logical. We've managed to control them and understand them, but they still need to be released, the same as that wild beast you mentioned. Nowadays, we show our feelings the direction in which to run, but what if you just let yours run wild? Do you think you would be able to herd them after?"

"That's an interesting and relieving question. Do you think I could do it? Has there been any successful case?"

"It could work, in theory, but it wouldn't be pleasant to you, the same as raising a child is rather taxing to the parent. However, you could get the altruistic pleasure parents get to see their child become a good person or the pleasure teachers get from seeing their students master their disciplines. Unfortunately, I don't think you could totally let yourself go with Valentin, because it might trigger a chain reaction with his own, wild feelings. What I was proposing was that you let yourself go intermittently, that is, first he and then you, to keep your emotions in check. I'm sure you're able to hold your emotions in front of his show of affection, but is he able not to react impulsively to yours?"

"No, he's not, and that's why I think we need time to cool his affection for me. If it survives, then we'll be together again, if not, then, I would've wasted a year of my life waiting for him."

"I think a year is a reasonable amount of time and I agree with your strategy and wish you luck. If ever you feel weak or hopeless, contact me immediately, please. Otherwise, let's meet again in two weeks to see how you're dealing with the concomitant emotions."

“Thanks, doctor. Your words are of much help.”

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On further sessions, however, Milena started showing erratic behavior, probably a withdrawal effect from not having contact with Valentin for months:

“ I don’t want normality; I want extraordinariness, and no one can do extraordinariness; we can only feel it…”

“Exactly, we can’t create extraordinariness, but only recreate it in our minds. Also, extraordinariness implies normality; without normality, how do you measure the extraordinariness of your emotions?”

“Finding love is always extraordinary, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but love is not an emotion, but a decision. We don’t find it; we assume it whenever we see the chance and feel like it.”

“I know. I think I meant the new courage I found when I decided to love Valentin. If only I had the strength …”

“If only. But allow Valentin the chance to be your stronghold. Let his absence be like the inspiring silence the public gifts musicians during their performance. How long have you been apart?”

“I’m sorry, doc, I lied by omission. I’ve met him a couple of times. I was too ashamed to tell you. I didn't do it for my sake; he was distraught and I feared for his life. I know this may draw back the treatment to zero, but I didn’t have the heart to turn him down. Nothing physical happened, although he insisted so many times. I tried to soothe him with words, but I think my presence was more relevant to his peace of mind than my logic. I felt like a pacifier to a baby; I’d never felt like that before. It’s denigrating but so satisfying; I guess the way mothers feel when they learn to soothe their babies. So base, so inadequate to our human potential, but at the same time, so human, so close to our nature.”

“It’s not nature but nurture. Reproduction is indeed in our nature, but it takes away from our other nature: evolution. Reproduction is the resource of an organism that’s stuck in its development, and therefore, it’s archaic to us, together with its concomitant responsibility: raising a child. Fondness for parenthood is therefore today an atavistic nature, but we nurture it so our children can grow psychologically strong. There’s nothing

wrong in wanting to be a good mother, but it's wrong to transfer these feelings to the man you love. It's an emotional trap you fell into because that man represents your fertility, that is, your potential progeny, and because he isn't completely emotionally developed, you try to make up for his defectiveness by treating him as a baby. At the same time, you remind him of his carefree childhood, which reinforces his childish behavior. This wouldn't happen were he not immature to start with, but now that you already find yourself in this situation, you need to learn to get out of the vicious circle. Also, if he wants to see you, he needs to do it for the right reasons, not to soothe his troubled mind, and you must simply trust that he will survive himself. If he isn't able to stay alive by himself, then there's nothing we can do to help, and we can only reap sorrows by trying to stop the inevitable."

"I understand, doc, but he's very convincing. It's so hard to believe he's less evolved than us when you listen to his eloquence."

"Not all beautiful words are true; sometimes the truth is simply ugly. Remember that an animal fights back the hardest when it's almost defeated. Just keep your humility and remember that you aren't infallible and you can fall into logic traps too. I'm sure he's very convincing in his wrongfulness."

"He is, doc. It's as if millennia of science and intellect had been in vain, whenever he presents to me a reality that's far from how we understand it today. While I see the error in most of his train of thought, there are some sparks of genius that I can't ignore."

"That's true for all regressed people, but especially for intellectual ones such as Valentin. They're the key to our evolution, but they are not to be toyed with. They're black holes of primitive knowledge, and we should keep the appropriate distance."

Chapter Twelve

Conrad's feed was more preponderant than at first thought. We all know that it's always a possibility, whenever we undertake the recording of some valuable information, to be fed back, but I would never have expected it to happen while I was already feeding something back. This is the first time I see a treble quantum entanglement, and there's not much I can say about it, other than sharing with you my fascination. I've read about treble entanglements in theory, but no one has successfully done them in my time. I know for a fact that the entanglement began when Conrad inputted his knowledge on this matter. This means that my thoughts were only mine till then, but after that, everything I said in this recording was imbued with Conrad's views. The previous chapter and this one are therefore a conjunction of my thinking and his, the same as if he were beside me, advising me, as I record this book. I can feel Conrad in my thoughts as I'm doing it. It's an exhilarating feeling, similar to hearing a joke and repeating it or watching a film and then talking about it.

Digression aside, let me start by emphasizing the fact that, since there's no eternal good or evil, philosophers today don't moralize; they just predict what the next good will be. Similar to Eastern thinkers before the first millennium, today's philosophers always relate their theories to the source, connecting their thoughts to the essence of evolution, where the world is devoid of origin and creationist force. Hence, Conrad's interest in this romantic story, which seems to reach the core of evolution and answer the question of the nature of life.

Before going further into the story, I need to introduce you to you the paradox of paradise. This is a well-known paradox of our time, and it consists in the simple question: Why would we wish to live in paradise? There have been numerous reasons to wish for heaven, especially in your time, but they've gradually dwindled, till today we're left mostly with one answer: eternal life. So for us, the question of paradise is a question of whether we want to live eternally or not and what this eternity should look like. Many argue that eternal life is by definition hell, since the definition of hell is: a state from which we can't get out and in which we can't move forward. So, many thinkers today obviate this paradox by proposing that: There's no paradise, since perfection means stagnation and therefore hell.

There are, nevertheless, some philosophers that argue for eternity. Their premise is that, if we are all eternal beings getting alternatively brought into and out of life, eternal life means simply the awareness of previous states of being, interrupted by states of dormant being. In that sense, we all have the capacity to become eternal, if only we could remember our previous lives. In this scenario, paradise is simply the awareness of our eternity and the relief that comes with it. The same as a gamer doesn't get very sad when he loses a video game, because they know that they can play it again and better. This is the paradigmatic theory today: We're on our way to reaching eternity thanks to our constant efforts toward total awareness.

There is a third theory that, although it's the least popular, it's maybe the most interesting one, since it gives birth once again to the paradox of paradise. Some philosophers theorize that eternity cannot be interrupted by states of non-being or dormant being, but it must be a state of constant awareness. They explain that sleep is an attribute of mortal beings, since they need to regenerate and, in a way, reset themselves every night, reflecting in this way the mutable essence of their existence. However, eternal beings cannot alter their existence, that is, they cannot cease to exist, but they need to be in a

state of constant being. Eternal humans would therefore never fall asleep and never die. They wouldn't need regeneration, only meditative or contemplative states to arrange their thoughts and memories. Since they would be beyond death and sleep, it's only logical that they would be able to decide when and which memories to erase, and they would even control their biological development, getting older or younger on demand. This theory is very smooth until we get to the question of paradise: what would paradise look like for these eternals? And here we bump again into the unavoidable paradox: If you can't die or evolve out of this state of eternity in which you are, isn't it just a convoluted version of hell? Granted, these eternals can choose to start all over again by growing younger till they become newborn babies and by erasing all their memory. The problem is that, since they are aware of this process of rejuvenation and blank slate memory, they will eventually lose interest in perpetuating it, the same as a gamer loses interest in playing a game after a while. Granted, they wouldn't have any recollection of their previous lives, but they would feel the inanity of it all: the aimlessness of their existence. Thus, this third theory becomes just a fancy version of the first theory: only hell can be eternal. These eternal beings may have sparks of paradise, but their existence would be a hellish one since they're trapped in a senseless state.

The paradise paradox is at the core of the existential question, and I may have bumped into a solution by mere chance, which thanks to Conrad's input I'm now realizing. I don't want to jump the gun on my conclusions, so I'll follow the chain of events and the line of arguments that led to the dénouement of Valentin's love story. This might sound vain, but it's harder to make solid conclusions today than it is in your time, because we handle too much information and sometimes have to deal with intellectual interference, which is my case. On the one hand, Conrad's input is like intellectual scaffolding which allows me to repair my cognitive building, but, on the other hand, it augments the incertitude of when to finish it. Because in your time, you follow a series of consecutive steps until you reach a conclusion, which you then present to society. If you go back on your steps, you do it after, as a correction or even retraction to your work. Today, we crowd-source our theories, which are corrected as we invent them. We need to be careful, however, not to skip one step of the logic path, because it may lead us to the wrong conclusion. I'm therefore a very important link in the intellectual chain, since Conrad's knowledge is entangled with mine. Whatever conclusion I arrive at now, it will reflect on Conrad's thoughts, since we're

now thinking in tandem. I may mislead Conrad in the same way as he may mislead me, and that's the disadvantage of working in entanglement.

Right now, I know the conclusion I need to arrive at: that Valentin and Milena's love story is an example of a paradoxical paradise, but I still don't know how to arrive there. My first premise is that their romance is like paradise: a desirable state. The questions that arise from that premise are: are they free to get out of this state and can they move forward in it? And if they do, do they get out of paradise or remain in it? Can there be more than one paradise, or maybe paradise is a succession of desirable states? If that were the case, we could avoid the issue of the stagnation of paradise and maybe also the issue of freedom.

Chapter thirteen

From Milena's therapy sessions, the only conversation between her and Valentin recorded in full is the following one, which happened six months after their breakup:
(The Cosmic Microwave Background sound fades in and out swiftly)

"Do you love me at all, Milena? What kind of sick game are you playing with me? I know you feel the same as me, so why can't we just forget about everything else and be together?"

"You ask me whether I love you, but it's up to you to answer that question. Just ask yourself: What have I been doing all this time if not loving you? Don't you feel my care for you? But you don't always get what you want…. Sometimes you get what you need."

"Stop quoting the Rolling Stones, please. This is serious."

“I know it’s serious, Valentin, but that doesn’t mean we need to take it so seriously. I know our happiness is at stake, but getting some distance from ourselves always helps us make the best decision. The end arrives for all of us, so the best we can do is to add some humor to this tragedy called life.”

“And humor is the last refuge of humanity, the last thing you lose, just before losing hope. You said that last time I was angry at you, remember? And you made a silly joke and dissipated all my anger. And I was angrier because of that. I felt insulted by the lightheartedness with which you approached such an important subject to me. But you showed me that I’m not that important, and I thank you for that. I was taking myself too seriously, but I think I understand you and the rest of the people now. It’s not that you don’t care. It’s that you can’t care; otherwise, you’d go mad. There’s no way of getting attached to the world without losing our minds. So let’s embrace humor and succumb to our tragedies in Shakespearean style.”

“And you showed me another way, Valentin, your way. You live outdated philosophy and ancient songs as if they were brand new. You brought a breath of fresh air to my life. Being with you is like seeing life through a child’s eyes. I admire you, Valentine. You’re special, and that’s a great quality in today’s society. The rest of us may not have your urges or hopeless desires, but we’ll also never have your charm… If it’s not much to ask right now, would you play a song for me?”

“Milena, you break my heart … You know I’d give my charm away any day just to become normal and be with you. I’ll never understand why you chose not to be with me. It’s so simple to like each other and be together. What’s there to think about other than your own desire?… But I’ll sing you a song:

Oh, lipless, soulless gal,

when will you fetch that heart of yours

to bring it here where it belongs

side by side with mine?

Oh, you bland, bleak gal,

will you write your own song,

instead of taking away mine

to steal the crumbs of my soul?"

"That's beautiful, Valentin. I wish I had your talent to feel things."

"You don't really wish it. You're just bluffing. I wish you had my talent, and my pain… and so many other things I can't name."

"Try not to hate me, Valentin."

"But you don't understand. I wish I could show you the intensity of my hatred, but then you wouldn't be here anymore to finally see it."

"Don't speak like that, please. I tried my best not to hurt you. You need to do your part, letting it go."

"It's easy for you to let go. You can easily find a suitable match, but there's no app to fix my broken heart."

"So fix it yourself and stop whining. It doesn't suit you, Valentine. Whining doesn't suit any free person. You have a sound mind and a strong will: use it to your advantage."

"I wish I could use them to put you six feet under in my backyard."

"I'm glad you've recovered your humor. I used to love you too, Valentin, and I still do. Remember it, love is also in the air between us. Just breathe it in and breathe out the disappointment."

"Stop quoting third-millennium philosophy. I read all the theory and I understand the mechanics, but you're making a false assumption: You're assuming I already know how to breathe."

"You're right, Valentin. I'll stop sermonizing you. I only want you to know that I'm here when you need me, and that I didn't break up for my sake as much as for yours. If you don't realize it right now, you'll see it ten years from now, when you'll only have to beckon me to come to your side."

"I don't need you to be at my beck and call in ten years. I need you to be fully mine now."

"I can't, Valentin. I'm sorry."

"If you're sorry, and you have no heart, imagine how sorry I am."

"I don't need to imagine it, Valentine. I feel it. I'm not devoid of feelings. I only process them differently."

“Yes, processed feelings are the only ones your body seems to crave.”

“You’re right again, Valentin. But have pity on me; I didn’t choose to be like this, the same as you didn’t choose to be like you are.”

“But I chose you, and you didn’t choose me, and I can never forgive you for that.”

“And I’m not asking for your forgiveness; just your understanding.”

“But I understand, Milena. I just can’t accept it. I agree with you logically, but I disagree with you morally. To me, you’re just a coward. Call it some old fashion name: civil duty or self-sacrifice; call it wisdom if you wish; I just call it cowardice.”

“Fear is ingrained in us, Valentin. Please understand that I’m not a daredevil.”

“But that’s very clear already.”

“Goodbye, Valentin. I need you to go now, please.”

“Don’t need to beg for my absence. I’m already gone.”

“But take care, Valentin. Remember I care about you.”

“Yes, from afar, like a hitman cares about where his bullet ends.”

“If this hitman would allow himself to be hit by his own bullet, then yes, I’m like him.”

“You don’t need to. I’d never harm you. Actually, I’ll put you out of harm’s way and just become a lost bullet.”

“Don’t do that, but please go and forget about me for a while. It will do you good.”

“Bye, Milena.”

“Bye, Valentin.”

Chapter fourteen

I've been paying sporadic visits to Valentin. He's become a complete troglodyte; he never leaves his cabin at the riding hall and, on the few occasions he can meet by chance the riding trainees, he goes out of his way to avoid crossing their paths. Only once in a while does he exchange a few words with the other horse caretakers and the trainers, but even this is not really necessary for his job, so no one dares to bother him; no one except for me. I even dare call myself his only friend, so I couldn't think of leaving him alone during this difficult time of his. I admit that for the rest of us, a breakup is never a big deal, and it doesn't need much comfort from friends or psychological help, so I can't know how he feels, but his sadness is so pervasive that I feel sad for him.

The last time I went to visit him, his beard had grown at least five centimeters. It was pitch black, wavy, and soft as his hair, which had grown almost to his shoulders. I had never seen a beard like that in real life. I must admit that, together with the genetic editing out of chronic diseases and undesirable traits in general, genetic engineering also took care of shallower things such as body hair. Most women today don't grow body hair at all, but some men are still born with beards. It's a racial thing. As I mentioned before, there are no cultural differences anymore, we all share the same global culture, but there are still racial differences among us. Globalization blurred all races into one long time ago, but thanks to genetic engineering, some recessive genes not only remained phenotypical, but they became prevalent among certain groups. Because nowadays, when it comes to social and political values, we favor homogeneity, but when it comes to entertainment, art or sexual selection, we favor heterogeneity. In practice, this means that people generally choose to pass on a mutated gene that would make the child more unique. The mutation in the melanocortin-1 receptor, which gave some people red hair, or the various mutations of the oculocutaneous albinism gene, which gave some people albinism or blue eyes, tend to be passed on to progeny when they appear recessively in one of the parents. This means that practically ninety-nine percent of fertilizations are done in vitro, and only one percent of people decide to have natural babies today. This one percent occurs only in the safest places on Earth, where naturally born people can be easily treated for the eventual illnesses they might inherit. Being naturally born is also sexually appealing today, the same as regression, but the latter condition is a wild card, since there's no way to treat it or eradicate its negative features, so few people dare to establish a relationship with the regressed.

Among the different prevalent races, such as the redheads, the melanos, the mezomelanos, the albinos, the mezoalbinos, the mongols, the biliverdinos, and the blondes, there are different predilections when it comes to body hair. Among women of all races, there's a predilection for total lack of body hair, although, some people choose to pass on the lipase H protein coding gene responsible for hairiness to their babies to make them unique. In the case of men, there's a higher predilection for body hair, especially beards. Around twenty percent of men have subtle facial hair, but only five percent is able to grow beards, and most of them are mezomelanos, although there is also a high number of blonds among bearded men.

I never asked Valentin about his parents, but they must be wonderful people if they gave him such a beautiful trait. It must have been difficult for them to deal with his regression, and I understand why they're estranged now. It's not easy to sustain a friendship with Valentin, so I imagine how difficult must have been for them to raise him. He told me only that he'd left his home when he was nineteen and that he visited them once a year. They exchange messages, but they only make small talk and he tells them positive things about his work, he never shares with them anything related to his personal life. "They are the best parents a normal kid could have asked for," he told me once. "I just don't want to worry them with my ravings. They accept me the way I am, but they don't understand me completely. I don't understand myself completely at times."

I must confess that I didn't see it coming. I thought I could handle myself and remain neutral. What I did falls into the category of aiding and abetting regressive misconduct, a misdemeanor penalized with a fine and the interdiction to have further contact with the regressed person. I couldn't bear abandoning Valentin: He gave me the uncomfortable responsibility of being his best friend when he confided in me so recklessly. Mind you, it's not a matter of loyalty; we don't believe in that today. We don't even believe in unconditional love. A friendship, the same as any other relationship, can easily fall apart today if one of the parts crosses the lines of healthy social interaction. That's exactly what Valentin did when he begged me to tell him what would be of Milena in the future. I wouldn't have known about it, were it not for the recordings received from Conrad, so I feel I was tricked into this situation. If I had known about Conrad's feedback in advance, I would've made a greater effort to keep a healthy distance from Valentin. I just simply wasn't expecting this encounter with him to be so relevant to my book. I had meant this novel as a tool to better your society and inspire you to achieve harmony with nature and each other, but Valentin came into the narrative, twisting it out of any recognizable shape. Now I also understand the important role Conrad plays in this event. He's also an accomplice, and he'll pay his own moral debt in the future, but I have more to lose than him, so I'll commit a felony. I won't confess to anyone that I gave Valentin information about Milena, that is, I tampered with their future. This secret will die with me, or otherwise, I'll be condemned not to see Valentin for a period no shorter than two years. I'm cowardly hiding behind the same law I broke, which means that no one who has read this book can reveal this felony I committed. This is no loophole, but simply a symbol of the trust on which our current law is based. The same as a doctor trusts his patient to

take the medicine he's prescribed, the law enforcers trust us to be honest about our actions, since the penalties are only fair to make up for the damage inflicted, and not exemplary or retaliatory. I'm aware of the karmic imbalance I'm creating with this action, which may seem to you just a ripple on the sea. But a small ripple may unchain further chaotic reactions and provoke utter chaos.

I told Valentin that he was abusing our friendship by asking me something I was obliged to keep secret. I explained to him my difficult situation, since I didn't want to abandon him, and that's why I risked revealing some sensitive information to him by keeping contact. On my part, I begged him to respect our friendship and to avoid risky subjects about the future, but he insisted. He argued that friendship is above the law and that he wasn't asking me to give my life for him, but to break a silly law that could save his life. He was right and wrong in his argument. He's right in the fact that the law is arbitrary, because non-regressed people are allowed to know about their future. It may look silly, the same as a wild deer looks to you when it runs away desperately at your sight. But the deer doesn't know of your intentions and their reaction might not be that silly if instead of you they saw a hunter. We simply don't know enough about regression, so this silly law is nothing more than a precautionary measure, which I was forced not to obey. I told him something which to me had seemed irrelevant until that moment, but which took full meaning when Valentin mentioned it. The revelation came when he asked: "Will she keep faithful to me, even if we can't be together, or will she abandon ship and meet someone else?"

I hadn't thought in those terms before. Indeed, by rule we abandon ship when it's sinking; it's the most reasonable thing to do. But when Valentin pronounced it, with his meaningful expression, I understood that it's not the only way; that we still have an option: to sacrifice ourselves. Bear with me, because to me what Valentin had just said sounded as incongruous as the hunger strikes organized in your era. In today's society, euthanasia is a human right, so you can announce it and dramatize it as much as you want, but it keeps being your individual choice. No one interferes, although inside the cities nanobots are always inclined to save your life against your will, just to be on the safe side. It's therefore customary to perform suicides in the wilderness, so as not to take away nanoresources from other people who may actually need them. As I mentioned earlier, those who commit suicide either no longer have the will to live or have some neurological condition that doesn't allow them to function properly anymore. But, for the sake of argument, let's

imagine that I decide to become a tyrant and oppress someone. I know they can kill themselves, so I need some other leverage than mere violence. I need to give them some allurement, such as comfortable enough conditions and the possibility to fulfill their biological needs. This is the system that Marx called: the proletariat. In such a system, if some people decide to kill themselves by cutting their veins open or stopping eating, I will still have control of the mass, which will remain as comfortable as frogs in warming-up water. Also, as a means of protest, killing themselves is the worst choice they have, because it's equal to giving up and taking the coward's way out. Hunger strikes were the result of badly implemented dictatorial plans, which means that they were an erroneous reaction to a distorted reality.

I told Valentin that Milena would have a lover in two months, but it would be just a fling because Valentin will eventually end up with her. I thought this news would calm his anxiety and that he would come up with some outdated romantic theories, such as: If you love something, let it go, and if it comes back to you, it's yours. But Valentin's reaction showed me that regression is really unpredictable and untreatable. He became furious the moment I told him that. I thought that this would be proof to him of his fallacious romantic idea that they were "meant to be." I thought I had understood his way of thinking and that this was what he wanted to hear. I really thought I was giving him a sedative, but instead, I gave him a stimulant. He said, to my astonishment: "If she dared be with another man, that actually means that we aren't meant to be together."

I was dumbfounded because I'd read the reports that indicated that they would end up together, but then I tried to soothe myself, thinking that Valentin would change his mind later and forgive Milena for her indiscretion. However, I wasn't able to calm myself down. A chill immediately ran through my spine when I considered the possibility that I had ruined their happy future; that maybe Milena would have decided not to tell Valentin about her affair with another man, and that that would've been an indispensable reason for them to up together. I didn't know what to say, but I started crying, which I had never done, except during films and when my favorite grandfather died:

"Forgive me, Valentin," I said "Please hate me instead of her. I shouldn't have told you about her personal life. I had no right."

“Being a good friend doesn’t need forgiveness. And I still mean that Milena and I are meant to be. The fact that you revealed her intended actions to me before it’s too late assures me of it.”

Only then I understood the full scope of my mistake. Valentin would try to change the future, messing up the fabric of reality: free evolution. He would try to skip one step: The lover Milena needs to finally choose Valentin. Without this step, it would be tantamount to kidnapping someone and forcing them to become his lover, just out of the conviction that they’re meant for each other. To rush the natural course of something is such a grave mistake that we haven’t created laws against it, the same as no laws against genocide existed before the Holocaust, or the same as you don’t have laws against drinking in private or performing cosmetic procedures on yourselves, because you believe that people can be allowed to use their own discretion and that they know better than ending up in an alcoholic coma or looking like plastic monsters.

I tried to dissuade him from confronting Milena about this, but to no prevail. I gave Valentin the sad ultimatum that, if he tried to interfere with the natural development of Milena’s life, I would be forced not to see him again. He stoically accepted this fact and didn’t try to change my mind. He even said: “I know I’m going down a dark and hopeless path, and I wouldn’t ask you to follow me. As much as I will miss your soothing company, I’m glad that we’re parting now as friends and that I can say, in my last days, that there was someone who really understood me. Take care, Efrain, and if destiny puts us together again, I hope it will be in merrier circumstances.”

“Let’s not say goodbye, then Valentin,” I said, “if there’s really nothing I can do to stop you. Maybe you’re right in everything, then, and I’ve been wrong all this time. Maybe I was a tool of this destiny you strongly believe in. I’d be glad if that was the case. Then the only thing left to me would be to wish you good luck and hope for the best. Let’s say goodbye for now, but not forever.”

“Yes, my dear friend. Goodbye for now, then.”

Chapter Fifteen

(The sound of cosmic radiation reverberates for several seconds)

"Tell me in full detail, Milena, how did your planned meeting go?"

"When the day of our meeting was approaching, I suggested to Valentin that we meet in a new, remote place to get a different perspective on us. He agreed but said that it was not necessary to go so far away to reach a new point of view, so he suggested the dunes of Krynica Morska. The place can only be reached by float. We were told that it would be dangerous by boat, for the reason that it could be snagged by the skyscrapers that emerge from under the sunken cities en route to the island. I was about to say hello, as if we had seen each other only a day before and neither of us had changed in the past few months. However, when I saw him land the float and get out of it, I felt a dormant longing awaken and overwhelm me.

"We haven't seen each other for a long time, Valentin," I said.

And he: I wish I could say the same, but we have been seeing each other in my nightmares for a long time.

I: It's a pity that I don't remember dreams.

He: Well that's too bad because you have to face the monster to defeat it.

I: So I am an incubus?

He: Perhaps, and you incubate my monster.

I: You know it's been Halloween and recently Valentine's Day since we last met?

He: That's right, wait a minute, I have to go back to the float because I forgot something. When I get back we'll start from the beginning.

I: We can even start from the middle.

Valentin went to the ship and, when he returned, he held a bouquet of transparent peonies; freshly cut flowers that took on a gray-blue hue in the partially overcast sky. He handed them to me tentatively, perhaps because I once told him what I thought of this relic of pagan sacrifice.

He: Bear with me a moment, Milena. I thought about this speech for a long time, but when I saw your blond hair floating around your eyes the color of these flowers, my fanciful monologue completely evaporated and Tagore's words came to me:

In my dreamy sky, you are an evening cloud
and full of love, my longing shapes and paints you,
until you become the property of my boundless dreams.

I was so touched that for a moment I couldn't get a word out. And he, without waiting long for my reaction, went on, as if following a cue from an invisible director :

"You know, pink roses used to be the most popular flowers. They were romantic not only because of their inherent beauty but also because they allowed our minds to fantasize. Since the color pink has no wavelength, what we really see is an illusion created by our brains mixing red and purple light. However, my flower is more real because it reflects the color of the sky and your eyes, which are as real to me as my own existence."
When I finally recovered, I said, "My eyes also have no color of their own, Valentin, and remain susceptible to the stormy sky."
"And yet," he said, "their color is more vivid to me than all the other colors my eyes are stuffed with."
And I: Your *hello* would've done the trick.
He laughed wholeheartedly, in a way that only he can, and said: "Well then, hello, how are you, Milena?"
I: Much better now that I see that you're hopeless at romance. This allays one of my fears: that you will make the next girl fall in love just as easily.
He: That's the point; romance is only real when it's hopeless. It's like an out-of-harmony symphony pleasurable for the intended audience, but irritating to everyone else; and it's the only trap I know, tailored precisely to you.
I: I guess you mean you're a magician whose tricks only work on me. Around us, people can see how silly I look; how I succumb to illusion.
He: Then they can also see how pathetic I look, revealing to everyone my secrets, just to charm you.
Me: So we are even. We both lose our image in front of the world.
Him: So let's lose it completely. I don't like to do things half-heartedly. Start by aligning your magnet to mine so that there is no more repulsion.
I: You already did that when you disrupted the laws of physics by magnetizing me. I apologize for all the time you wasted waiting for me. Fortunately, you are as persistent as the coronavirus.
He: Well, you know, what doesn't kill you mutates and tries for another hundred years.
I: Would you wait a hundred years for me?
He: No. I would save you again, this time from you.
I: Then I'm glad I wasn't inoculated against you ....

We looked at each other in silence for a while. Then I continued: "Something is bothering you, Valentin. It didn't sound like you when we talked last time."

He: It's all right. I have to deal with my own monsters.

I: But, in fact, you don't have to. I think I know what's going on. I looked into my future. I read Conrad's report about us. I wouldn't have done that in the past, but since I met you, I think differently. It was irresponsible on my part, but I'm not sure about responsibility anymore. True development carries risks, and I took my own. I saw that I would meet someone and go out with him for a while. I also learned that it wouldn't be anything serious, but it would be something I would regret so much that I would have to hide it from you. I didn't like this version of me. If it wasn't for you, I would've simply dated a guy I found attractive and then admitted to it to my regular partner. That's what I would do to anyone but you. In a way, your infantilism in not accepting reality helps me be a better person. The fact that I know you and know that your ego couldn't stand it if I went out with another man makes me sacrifice my freedom. You made me believe in sacrifice, Valentin. You changed me.

He: Just to be clear. You're not going to date him?

I: I don't know him yet, but no, I won't date him.

He: Oh Milena, Milena, you have reconciled me with myself!

Me: And you reconciled me with nineteenth-century books, as well as twenty-first-century songs and movies.

He: It was the height of romanticism. Before people started becoming cynics, sorry, I mean realists.

Me: In a way you are ahead of your time, Valentin; only backwards.

He: That's a cool way to put it. A lot of people just call me regressed.

Me: Let's regress together then.

Him: I wouldn't regress with anyone other than you."

.....

"Milena, I am happy for your honesty. But I really can't recommend this kind of behavior. This way you are walking in darkness. Are you sure of your promises to Valentin?"

"Yes. I am sure, just as I was sure the first time I hid something from you. Some things exist only in the dark, and I would like to explore them."

"Since you're going down an unknown path, I'll have to stop our sessions. When you decide to return, please contact me immediately."

"I will, doctor."

Chapter Sixteen

Valentin has had a great effect on me and, through me, on Erin. She woke up today and told me, while we still were in bed, that she wants to have a child. Nothing extremely weird about it; We were planning on having one in the future. It's simply that I'm sure some primeval instinct kicked in in her when she saw the committed I am to my friend. I may be Valentin's only friend, but he's the only friendship I established based on

emotions. Now I understand the adage: Money and friends should never mix. In today's society, lending money to friends doesn't differ from lending it to a stranger. Responsibility and objectivity are always preponderant in such a transaction. But in the case of Valentin, I know I would be embarrassed to ask him to pay me back, the same as I would commit crimes for him, as I already did. My change has aroused mild jealousy in Erin. She wants to divert my attention towards her and the project of a baby. We talked about this. She's well aware of this feeling in her, a feeling that still plays a subconscious role in your society. Jealousy is a poison, but it can be taken in microdoses to get high. So, we've become addicts with Erin, and the drug was provided by me, by allowing my emotions towards Valentin to play themselves out. Erin doesn't blame me for it. She could've simply left, since there's no use in blame. But she's staying, full of acceptance. She has now given Valentin the nickname of: "The catalyst" of our love.

The last few months at work have been filled with watching wild horses that, unlike Mustangs, are being set free on purpose on the domed ecosystem of the Hellas Planitia. This is the place chosen for the first Martian settlement, called Karahan Plain, in honor of the cradle of terrestrial civilization. The same as their American counterparts, wild horses on Mars quickly adapt to life in their new environment, showing exceptional endurance to its hostility. Over millennia, horses had undergone genetic modification through the use of breeding techniques adapted to the needs of their masters. This led to a huge decline in the genetic diversity of these animals. Currently, we use genetic engineering processes to retrieve their advantageous primeval features, some of which date back to the Eocene Epoch. Carefully rewriting or turning off aggressive genes and adding the domestic gene, we managed to create a species that possess the disposition of friendly dogs and a modest birth rate, which means that they won't reproduce out of control nor pose a threat to people if they wander off forests up to the city borders.

We flew to the city two months ago, so I've been disconnected from Valentin, except for sporadic exchanges of messages. Getting used to the low air pressure and lesser gravity was a full-time job for the first two days, but these nano-exoskeletons make it very bearable, and they are as comfortable as spandex. The only disadvantage is that they numb our weather sensation, so wearing them is the equivalent of wearing a thick coat and thermal face mask in subzero temperatures. We never take them off, except when having sex, and even then, they come comes off automatically but only partially

depending on the erogenous zones being touched, commingling with the partner's exoskeleton.

I just saw the recording of Milena's therapy session. It appeared from thin air among the other reports, as if I had overlooked it. That's all the evidence left behind when the future is tampered with: some solitary witnesses like me and Conrad, who could stubbornly insist to no avail on the first version of reality they knew about. But I don't think Conrad was surprised to see this alteration in the reality-time continuum. Were it not for him, none of this would have happened, which leads me to tranquilly put all the blame on him, feeling just like a pawn in his game of destiny. I can't guess his intentions, so I must humbly accept that his reasons are beyond my understanding. Paraphrasing the adage: People from the future work in mysterious ways.

My narration arrives to an end, since I have no more to say for the moment. Valentin and Milena are doing great, but since they both have now the status of regressed people, they've decided to settle in one of the remotest places on Earth: A meteorological outpost in the Andes, in Southern Argentina, called Ojos de Cielo. Milena does her research on climate change there, while Valentin idles away his time composing songs and riding horses. Maybe some of his songs will become popular one day, but that's something that Conrad failed to mention in his reports.

I promised Valentin to go visit them as soon as we get back from Mars, which was supposed to be in one month, until Erin had another revelation: This is the best place to raise our kids. She likes the rough look of this planet, and she thinks our kids will have a more interesting life here. "It's the new world," she said, "and besides, it would be hard to get used to not wearing the exoskeletons back on Earth. It would feel like nakedness." "You got a good point there," I said, and we laughed. Since then, we've been traveling around, getting acquainted with the region, and finding out in general about the planet. The more we learn about it, the more we like it. If we decide to stay, we'll probably pick one of the cities in The Hellas, but a beautiful option could be one of the subterranean megacities inside volcanoes, such as the Arsia or Pavonis Mons. Our bodies will obviously suffer from the acclimatization, but there's nothing current medicine can't fix, and Erin is actually happy to contribute to research on interplanetary migration health issues. I, on my part, am set on the Hellas, because of its cavernous beauty and the possibility to continue with my current work on Martian horses.

My original hypothesis that harmony is desirable has been subjected to correction: Harmony exists by default, that is, we naturally tend towards harmony, which doesn't make it necessarily desirable, the same as the fact that tending towards death doesn't make us desire it. Knowing that harmony will always prevail, we can choose to disrupt it, the same as a musician playing dissonant chords. Of course, the more the disruption, the more our lives become tense and weary, so it's only natural to try to avoid it and live a harmonious, though sometimes dull, life. I only have respect for people like Valentin, who dare to do things that we only manage to read and admire in ancient literature. I now understand the extent of the old-fashioned saying: "Real reading is allowing a book to change your life." It's more than mere entertainment for people in our time, the same as in yours, but you take it even more seriously. By purposefully failing to detach yourselves from the books you read, you choose to feel them instead of analyzing them. You understand them intuitively, before understanding them intellectually. You choose to pick the delicious fruit and devour it, without even asking what it's called. Through Valentin, I have learned to respect you all and your brave way of being. The conclusions of this story are for you to draw, or for Conrad to present, since I suspect he is in charge of this recording now. For my part, I can only be grateful to you all, because thanks to you, I am a man fulfilling his potential beside a loving and beautiful woman. So if some of you happen to be one of my ancestors: thank you for your genetic wisdom. Whatever you will do to the world, I trust you with it, and I wish you all farewell.

Chapter Seventeen

(The sound of the cosmos is heard evanescently.)

Philosophy in the forty-fifth century has no reason to exist. All the possible truths have already been divulged and the only thing left to us is to look at them from other angles. Some of you may be worried about your near future: overpopulation, a resilient global virus, global warming and the depletion of natural resources. Some of you can't escape your egotistical fears and only disguise them as ecology, spirituality or social conscience. Others can't escape their vanity, disguising it as veganism, political correctness, the cult of fitness or psychical well-being. For the last couple of millennia, our thinking has been imbued with a relentless positivism, as if by sheer tyranny of will we could always find our way to development. But humans have been stuck in a lower evolutionary circle from the beginning of civilization, since way before Efrain or you. You don't differ much from Efrain. He's just wiser than you in most things, but there's nothing he can say that you can't understand. However, what I'm about to say may not be comprehensible to you. I'm not supposed to send feedback more than two thousand years back, because the intellectual leap might be too great to bridge, and it's most probable that my message be misinterpreted or, to be more precise, that I have no cognitive tools to pass down my knowledge.

However, if we rely on Efrain's positive definition of truth, we should agree that it's eternal and unchangeable by nature, and therefore even the poorest attempts at seeing it clearly will yield fruits. Let's, therefore, analyze human nature from this popular positivist point of view in which there is an ultimate reality that can be rationally explained. You currently live in a dualist global society: There is spirit and there's matter, both of which are necessary to life. Most of you are purely materialistic, that is, you believe in technological progress the same as Efrain does. A few of you are purely spiritual, and you renounce all the material advantages of your civilization. Most of you are also positivists, that is, you believe in intellectual evolution; although you mostly seek material truths, and you relegate spirituality to a meta-intellectual level. You transition from spirituality into materialism as if transitioning from fiction to reality. There's a scission in your minds and souls.

Valentin and Milena's story is a version of Romeo and Juliet in which the lovers get to live and society begins its decadence because it can't learn anything from them, since it can't

kill them. Their truth, which is their passionate union, is too strong to break up because they live in another reality. Society and the world built up by its cognizance have therefore no dominion over them. The chaos that Valentin represents could only be activated by cooperation. The same as fire needs both matter and energy, that is oxygen, fuel and heat, chaos needs matter and spirit. Valentin's spirit wasn't enough to provoke a reaction, but it needed the oxygen of Milena's acquiescence and the fuel of her love to ignite. Chaos is the catalyst of evolution because it breaks down the conservative foundations of society. Evolution doesn't care about the whole but it focuses on the individual. Society's well-being is a mere hindrance to enlightenment and freedom. Survival of the fittest is the main principle of evolution: The conservatives who lag behind perish. Efrain's society was just a perfected version of yours, but its fabric had to be torn apart to give way to creative change. Jesus said: "You'll know the truth and it will set you free," but he should've added: "but it will make you unhappy." The first question is whether you want happiness or the truth. Happiness is really about blissful ignorance: to accept a situation as it is and stop analyzing it; to fall in love with a person, thing or situation by accepting it as they are and by forcing our will to declare that they are what we need. That's what makes us happy.

The second question is what freedom is and how to obtain it. Why is regression necessary to the equation? Because with wisdom comes more certainty, more know-how, and therefore less freedom to choose wrong. Stupid people are freer by nature, but they aren't aware of their freedom. Intelligent people, on the other hand, have fewer options when they're led by their reason because then they're forced to choose only what is right; they can't choose wrong. Therefore comes the paradox of wisdom: Truth won't set you free; it will just enslave you if you only choose with your intellect. That's why Valentin is so relevant to Efrain's society, because he makes the wrong choice on purpose to be free. He chose to hold on to his passion, which is counter to the evolutionary paradigm of Efrain's era, based on reason. I must admit that, had not been for my intervention, there wouldn't be a Hollywood ending to this story, and romanticism would've not prevailed. Valentin would've done something tragic after realizing that Milena wasn't the ideal he depicted her to be, and his nature would've been subdued. Society would've learned something and positive evolution would've won over primitive nature. But this new dénouement showed that regression does not necessarily hold back evolution, but that by holding on to the truth in our nature, we can actually reverse the course of evolution, changing its paradigm.

This is because truth manifests itself in its pure form and therefore it can't be explained by extrinsic means; it can only be understood intrinsically. Any attempt at explaining truth perturbs its purity and gives us only a flawed version of its original form, the same as a photon is changed through observation. At the same time, truth, the same as light, disperses falsity or error of observation. Therefore, only through pure intuition can we grasp the real truth; once we place our dirty hands on it to grasp it, its delicate nature is spoiled. Valentin's truth was his desire, which is nothing more than a conscious appetite. In Efrain's paradigm, this desire was considered a choice, because reason was like the light illumining the path to truth. Efrain's truth was life's substance, which could be apprehended through pure reason. In his mind, Valentin diverged from life's substance by choosing wrong, and that was the source of his unhappiness. But in the alternative paradigm in which we aren't absolutely free, but we have freedom of action in the universal organism called universe or nature, there are no absolute truths. In a group of beings dispersed through a wide area, every individual sees something different, and they all see some truth. Also, in this group, every individual reflects the will of the whole, since they don't have separate natures. Imagine simply ants working in unison, without a single leader. This communal mind was achieved in Efrain's society, but they kept the illusion of free will.

The only way to further evolve is to accept that truth is inessential. Sadness is therefore not in our essence either, but only a sociopsychological construct. Some people may be sad when someone dies, and others may rejoice in the fact that the dead go to a better place. Or, to give a simpler example, some people may be happy to eat a hamburger, while others may be sad that a cow was killed to make it. The problem with this paradigm is not that sadness exists, but that it coexists with happiness, like in the case of a vegetarian who loves hamburgers. If sadness existed separate from happiness, it could simply be avoided, and happiness could always be chosen, which was almost the case in Efrain's society. But life doesn't exist without death, and pleasure is just a fancy word for desirable pain. By being rational and acting in accordance with a transcendent nature, we avoid sadness, but we also avoid living. This is when the paradise paradox is created: virtuous people are less chaotic and more impervious to external stimuli, that is, they are only creatures and not creators. By transcending nature, they lose their individual freedom and become a mere extension of nature. Their actions are adequate, but not creative.

Since we are nature and everything that exists is an extension of ourselves, the only possible act of creation in the universe is rebellion against ourselves or our nature, that is, taking the forbidden fruit and starting all over again. There are as many individual truths as there are individuals in the universe, but the only ultimate truth lies in renouncing paradise, which is the only thing that will set us free. The same as Valentin, we need to go against our ideal nature, against our holy appetites, and simply let ourselves fall into willing error. In this way, we sacrifice our happiness to be reborn into freedom.

Society today has diverted from Efrain's reality. Answering my original question about the significance of Valentin's story: Human nature is chaos. The more chaotic we are, the faster we evolve, bringing unhappiness with it. Evolution is therefore rebellion and suffering, and paradise is acceptance and stagnation. Nothing can evolve without suffering and nothing can be reborn without dying. However, in the scheme of our petty lives, we tend to avoid evolution the same as we tend to avoid being reborn because we hate suffering, the same as we hate dying. Only on rare occasions do we take small doses of suffering and death, but the rest of the time we're conservative in our approach to life. That's why evolution is a low, gradual process; one ambivalent force leading nowhere in particular.

A novel by Juan Martin Sanchez

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